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# Forgotten Books

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# THE UNSEEN THING

## I. ITS SHADOW FALLS BEFORE IT

### I

“So kind of you to say so! Yes, we are all delighted—Guy has always been quite one of us—like a boy of our own. . . . Yes, Sir Charles is *so* pleased—he’s so fond of dear Guy, you know. . . . Oh, quite so—that’s what we all feel—how charming of you to put it into words! Made for each other—yes, it really does seem so, doesn’t it? But it isn’t at all up-to-date to think of marriages as made in heaven in these days, is it? More likely the other place—ah, quite so—of course—we all must feel that—how sweet of you to think so! . . . Yes, it’s to be quite soon—neither Sir Charles nor I would approve of a long engagement. . . . Yes, they’re both young, but they quite know their own minds—that’s so nice and modern, isn’t it? The young people of these days are so wonderful, *I* think—I am sure I never even knew I had

a mind at all when I was dear Grace's age. Probably I hadn't, you know—it wasn't the fashion for girls to have such things, then, was it? . . . *Must* you go? So sorry!—oh, I quite understand—such a drive just now, isn't it? Good-bye! Thanks so much—Grace will be charmed to come. . . . Yes, good-bye! So kind—just what we all feel! .. . *Good-bye!*”

Lady Strange spoke a little more languidly than usual, and looked a little more bored than it had been her habit to look for the last twenty and odd years. Perhaps languor and boredom were to be excused on this particular occasion, for she had been repeating the same phrases, with a few variations, for nearly two hours, and the freshness of both had begun to wear painfully thin, together with any original and maternal feelings of triumph which may have supported her through the first portion of the ordeal now drawing to its close. The fact that everybody expressed such unqualified approval of her daughter's engagement did not in the least blind her to the much more unqualified disapprobation which everybody felt, but did not express. The pretty speeches made, and answered in kind, did not deceive her ear, trained by long experience to detect the insin-

cerity of too fervent congratulations. She knew quite well that the women murmuring good wishes for Grace Strange and her cousin Guy Hilmour were inwardly grudging Grace her good fortune in securing Guy, or wondering what on earth Guy could have been thinking of to get engaged to Grace. Lady Strange was an admirably tolerant person. She had tolerated a large social acquaintance for years with such perfect resignation and broad-mindedness that she was known from one end of England to the other as “that sweet Georgiana Strange.” Nobody had ever succeeded in quarrelling with her—it would have been like quarrelling with a feather-bed; and if anyone had ever ruffled the even sweetness of her temper, she had disguised the fact with such art that the offender had never had the satisfaction of looking upon the inward havoc he may have wrought. At the same time, tolerance is not to be confused with stupidity, and Lady Strange knew the world, as it had presented itself to her, remarkably well. She understood its little ways perfectly, with the understanding which is so thorough that it contains no grain of bitterness. She accepted insincerity with the same philosophic calm with which she accepted her dinner.

Humbugs and cooks had a right to their respective places in the universe; she could not have imagined an existence devoid of either.

But, while she smiled and murmured commonplaces in answer to the general chorus of congratulation, she was conscious of being more bored than usual, and her eyes strayed wearily from the bland faces of her friends to the tall young figure of Grace at the other end of the great room. Grace had borne the ordeal of the afternoon with a courage equal to her own; she had received congratulations as perfectly as she did everything else—with a kind of dignified simplicity rare and delightful in this hurrying age. If she had not felt happy, she had looked it, and if she did not believe all that people said to her, no one would have suspected it. Her mother had found a kind of solace in her weariness in swift, occasional glimpses of Grace's radiantly untired face.

Now, when the last units of the chorus of congratulation were melting rapidly away, murmuring the customary phrases as they went, the group of young people had melted too, and Grace was almost alone. Guy, who hated functions, had slipped away early; the few girls who had lingered behind the others were

saying good-bye and escaping in laughing haste, for it was late. At last Grace was left with her cousin, Julian Strange, who had always been a third in her friendship with Guy, and seemed to-day to have played a part in the act of congratulation only inferior to that of the two principal performers. A sudden silence fell upon them as the last two girls disappeared, and they became conscious of the emptiness of the room, and of the fact that Lady Strange was coming towards them with an air of relief which made her always graceful progress appear almost brisk.

“I’m tired out, Grace, darling,” she called as she approached them. “How kind everybody has been—I’m so glad they’re all gone. Dear Grace, I hope you will never get engaged again—I could not stand another afternoon like this. . . . No, of course you won’t—you are always so certain of yourself, I know. It is such a relief to me that you are—I couldn’t have endured a daughter who wanted me to help her choose either her husband or her clothes—it has been quite enough trouble to me to look after my own. . . . Now, Julian, you naughty boy, don’t laugh at your poor wreck of an aunt—I’m sure I don’t know what I’m



saying in the very least, and anyway it doesn't matter, because you know what I mean. . . . Make him stay to dinner, Grace—I must really go and rest.”

She drifted away as she talked, and was out of the room almost before the last sentence was finished. Grace and Julian looked at each other and smiled.

“Poor dear Aunt Georgie, she's done up,” Julian said. “I can't stop to dinner, Grace—I must be off.”

The smile died in Grace's face. Perhaps she too was tired at last. Her radiant serenity and self-possession of the afternoon were gone, and it seemed to Julian that there was an anxious look in her eyes.

“Must you really go? I haven't had a minute with you alone, and I—I wanted to speak to you.”

Julian shrank back a little. He misunderstood her meaning, and was conscious of a momentary disgust at his task, a sudden hatred for what he knew was the proper thing to do.

“You know, I wish you every sort of good luck, dear,” he said. “I—I'm bad at saying things, but I don't mean them any the less for that. I hope you'll be very happy, and I think

Guy is——” He broke off, and was silent for a second. When he resumed his little speech he did not return to the subject of Guy. “You have every good wish I could possibly invent for you, and more.”

He ended hurriedly, with a glance at the little silver clock ticking placidly on the table beside them; but Grace caught the look, and read its meaning before he could make any attempt to escape.

“But I must speak to you—I must!” she said quickly, with agitated emphasis very unlike her usual cheerful calm. “Julian, you must give me five minutes—come to my den, and let us have it out in peace.”

“Oh, well, if it’s anything important——” He looked at her curiously.

“It is, but—I don’t know how to explain. You will probably think it all very absurd, but I have no one else to go to. One can’t confide this sort of thing to mamma—you’re a man and perhaps you will understand.”

“Why don’t you confide in Uncle Charles?” Julian asked, a little uneasily. “Or in—well, there’s Guy now, you know. I suppose he’s the proper person for you to confide in, isn’t he?”



There was a stifled bitterness in his tone, but Grace was in no mood to hear it. She made a little impatient movement.

“I can’t confide in Guy. Julian, you were always so quick to understand—don’t you see it’s something I can’t tell Guy?”

“Or you wouldn’t tell me?” He laughed, rather shortly. “Yes—it is a bit obvious, I admit. You have always told Guy things——” She interrupted him.

“No—I never have. Not—not the things that mattered most to me.”

There was a moment of silence—a silence which told much. Julian, as she said, was quick to understand. It seemed to him that in that moment he understood a number of things which had puzzled him before.

“I don’t know what you mean,” he said at last. “I don’t think I want to hear anything, if—if you don’t mind. Everything’s between you and Guy now—you must see that.”

“But I can’t tell Guy, because—oh, Julian, do understand!—do help me! It’s *about* Guy.”

He did not answer at once. It was all quite horribly embarrassing. He did not want to hear anything about Guy—he did not want even to hear Guy’s name. He certainly did not want

to be told something which Guy had or had not done, or to be asked to pronounce judgment upon it. That evening he felt that he could not have been quite just to Guy, with the best and most honourable intentions in the world.

“Do help me!” Grace said again, almost imploringly.

It was the tone he knew so well, and could never resist. Grace, in short skirts and with flying hair, had appealed to him with just the same accent in the days when she was always getting into scrapes from which he as constantly disentangled her. It was no good—he had to hear what she wanted to say.

“Very well—I can give you half-an-hour. Let’s go to the den.”

In the den they had had their juvenile quarrels and reconciliations, he remembered, their games, their lessons, and those delightful high teas at which Grace, in an unnaturally clean pinafore, had played hostess with the same radiant serenity with which she had this afternoon received the congratulations of her friends upon her engagement to Guy. In the den, he believed, Guy had proposed to her at the ripe age of seven—a prophetic shadow of another

proposal, made a few days ago. In the den he himself had been refused by her recently enough to leave a very sore recollection of memorable and unpleasant details. It was only in keeping with their joint ways of life that this last little drop of bitterness should be poured out to him in the shrine of so many memories.

So he followed Grace resignedly. The den, in spite of more recent transformation, retained an atmosphere all its own. One could almost imagine the old doll's house standing in its place against the delicate rose-colour of the wall, and the table spread for tea, and Grace's high chair at the head of it. The old flavour of young romance—which is the oldest thing in the world—hung about it still, reminding one of delicious fights with pirates, and of Red Indian games, in which Grace had played a stirring part, draped in a table-cloth, and crowned with nodding pheasants' feathers, begged from a sympathising cook. Julian sighed a little as he looked round him. A second glance revealed so many changes; and on the mantelpiece, emblem of the greatest change of all, stood a big photograph of Guy, looking out upon the room with a smiling air of possession. He was conscious that the photograph hurt him; his

own, a few inches away, seemed to have fallen suddenly into the background.

“Oh, Julian, I’m not happy about it—I’m frightfully worried!”

It was Grace’s voice, but so altered, so full of distress and doubt that he hardly recognised it. She came and stood beside him, looking at the photograph with troubled eyes. It seemed to him that she was searching Guy’s face for something which she wished to find in it, but which persistently escaped her.

“Not happy? Then why in the world did you accept him?”

She did not turn towards him. She spoke with her eyes fixed upon the photograph, as though upon a living thing.

“I accepted him because I couldn’t help it, Julian. I love him so much—he has always been everything to me. But now that it’s done, I don’t know whether I have been right—I don’t know whether it’s for the best. I don’t know—” she brought it out with an effort, as though against her will—“I don’t know whether I can make him happy.”

“Well, who on earth can, if you can’t?” Julian said, almost roughly. “He thinks you can—that’s the only thing that matters, isn’t it?”

“Yes, but — if he should be wrong? I believe he is wrong—he ought to marry someone quite different—someone more like himself. You know, the Hilmours are not a cheerful family, Julian — and I am far more like a Hilmour than Guy is—mamma has always said so. He ought to marry someone who would never have any doubts about anything, who would never be afraid——”

She broke off, with a quivering voice. Julian, standing beside her, felt that she was quite extraordinarily moved from her usual way of looking at existence. It was not like Grace to be afraid of anything, or to entertain doubts of any kind.

“But of what are you afraid?”

She was silent for a moment, looking still at Guy’s face, with its brilliant, almost wistful smile, its eager eyes, its expression of vivid unrest and expectation. It was as though those eyes which were at once smiling and half sad were fixed upon something very far away—something for which their owner waited and longed with an ever-growing passion of impatience which was almost painful to anyone who could read it.

“If he were different—not like that—it

wouldn't be so difficult," Grace said at last. "Julian, I don't know how to explain, but—but he isn't like other people. He is extraordinarily sensitive—he has a really terrible way of feeling things. Do you know why he went off this afternoon?"

"No. Why did he?"

"Because Kitty Fellowes was talking to me—she is lame, you know. He always goes when she is here—he says he can't stay in the room with her. I have told him fifty times that it's unreasonable and unkind, but nothing alters him—I don't believe he *can* stay when she is here. If I thought it merely fancy, merely morbid fastidiousness, I shouldn't mind so much; but it is really something in him—something he can't help. Anything like that makes him quite ill—I have seen him go white at the sight of anyone who was very ugly, or deformed."

"He ought to get over such silly nonsense."

"Yes—but what if he can't?—if he's made like that, and can't get over it?"

"But I don't see what that has to do with you. You are not—not exactly ugly, or deformed," Julian said, forcing an uncomfortable smile.

"Don't you see, that's just it? It is so



difficult to explain, but that's exactly what I'm afraid of." She turned away, and he heard again the swift quiver in her voice which hurt him with a sharp, physical pain. "Julian—how am I to put it? The one thing he cares for is beauty—he hates ugliness, he always has hated it. He loves me because he thinks me—pretty. . . ." Her voice broke. After a long pause, in a voice muffled and strangled, she said, almost in Julian's ear, "If I were not pretty—if anything happened to hurt me—disfigure me—he—he would hate me too."

"Good God, Grace, you mustn't think that! He's odd about ugliness or deformity, but—you mustn't think that."

"I don't think it—I know it," she said quietly. "He would hate me—and he couldn't help it, he could never conquer his hatred. And . . . and, Julian, it might happen so easily. An accident—an illness—a fall—and then everything would be over for me, and I should want to kill myself—I think I should kill myself, if only to set him free."

Julian stood silent and appalled. This was infinitely worse than anything he had expected. And the worst part of all was that in his own mind he knew Grace to be right.

“But—it’s nonsense, you know,” he said at last. “Fantastic nonsense. You’re not going to have an accident—and Guy isn’t so bad as that. Of course, he’s always been rather queer in that particular way, but you ought not to make it worse by being morbid about it. And—if you feel like this—you ought not to marry him. Suppose you are going to feel like it all your life—to be expecting something to happen, as you call it—how are you going to stand it, Grace? To feel like that would drive a woman mad in a week, I should think.”

“But it’s done now. I can’t undo it. Only, it worries me so frightfully, I had to tell someone.”

“And now you have told me, what can I do? It has not done any good, so far as I can see. There are things it’s best not to think of—not to see, or hear, or understand. Guy has this curious characteristic. It is no good to worry about it. Perhaps he will get over it in time, but, if he doesn’t, I don’t see how it is going to affect you, unless you set to work to make yourself miserable about it.”

He paused, feeling uneasy, and unsympathetic, and perhaps a little unkind as well. It was rough treatment, but common sense told him that it was the only sort of treatment which

could have any good effect. As he waited for Grace to speak, a light step came down the corridor, and a light tap sounded on the door. It opened and Guy put in a laughing face.

“Is the Hen Convention over, darling? I say, I’ve come back for some dinner if you’ll give it to me. Why, what’s old Julian closeted with you about? I’ll be jealous in a minute. Do get out, Julian—you look as though you had lost a fortune.”

“I was just about to take your polite and most elegantly expressed advice,” Julian said, at once annoyed and relieved by the interruption. “As for losing a fortune, I’ve nothing to lose. Good-bye, Grace—we shall all meet at the Kents’ dance, I suppose.”

Guy threw himself into a chair.

“Oh yes, you’ll see me there anyway. I’m going round doing the good boy, and being patted on the back. Grace is doing the same trick. It’s a beastly bore—or would be, if I wasn’t so infernally happy that twenty Hen Conventions wouldn’t ruffle a feather of my wings. Ta-ta, Ju—till to-night. Grace, give me five minutes, there’s an angel.”

The door closed on Julian’s exit. Grace looked irresolutely into Guy’s radiant face.

“I must go and dress, Guy. I’m late as it is.”

He put out an impetuous hand, and drew her down on the arm of the chair.

“You were talking to Julian about me,” he said. “Now, look here, I don’t like that. Why should you talk about me to him? I’m not interesting, really. I’m frightfully frivolous, and empty-headed, and all I want in the world is to have a good time—the very best of times—and for you to have it with me. And you were dissecting me, you and old Julian—you were putting my poor little butterfly soul on the end of a horrid pin, and trying to find out what it was made of. It isn’t made of anything, and you have been wasting your time and trouble. Don’t do it again, Grace. It’s not worth it, and I don’t like it.”

He was half serious, half in earnest—perhaps rather more than half in earnest, she thought. It was even possible that he was a little jealous, that he had really disliked finding her in conversation with Julian. She did not quite know about that. All she did know was that at moments like this it was impossible to resist Guy, impossible to shake off the spell of an odd charm which was almost boyish, almost childish; the fascination of some extraordinarily young, im-

mature, rather elfish spirit masquerading as a human being belonging to a singularly ordinary and commonplace age.

“How did you know we were talking about you?”

“Oh, I know everything, without bothering to listen at keyholes. I know you were talking about me. I even know what you said.”

She released herself with a sudden movement which suggested fear.

“What nonsense you talk, Guy! How could you know?”

She had risen, in spite of his effort to detain her, and stood facing him, uneasily, with eyes which would hardly meet his. He rose too, and looked at her for a moment in silence, smiling whimsically, yet a little sadly too. It struck her then, as it had done once or twice before, that beneath the surface of his gaiety there was often something hidden which was not gay at all, which was even tragic, and might some day become terrible.

“I know what you said. You were telling him why I went away this afternoon. You were saying it was absurd and unkind to feel as I do about—that. You told him that you were not certain whether it would be possible to go



through life successfully with a person so given over to impulse, so irrational, so abominably and airily unable to conceal either his feelings or his want of them.”

He paused, and let his eyes drift from her grave face to the mantelpiece.

“May I have a cigarette?” he said, in quite a different tone.

She nodded mutely. He came close to her, and took a match from the little silver box lying against the foot of his own photograph. She watched him light his cigarette without speaking. The small, trivial action seemed to absorb him entirely. He did not even look at her. Presently he threw the match away, and lifted his head. There was an odd, keen look in his eyes, as though they looked through her—as though he did really know everything, as he said.

“That is what you told him. Now deny it!”

She did not attempt denial.

“I am afraid of you sometimes, Guy.”

“I’m afraid of myself, too,” he said, quite gravely. “It’s rather awful to feel things so intensely — to know what people are saying about you, and thinking about you. I don’t like it. I wish I were stupid and ordinary and comfortable—and I’m not. I’d give anything



to be ordinary. I'm a freak, Grace—did you know you were engaged to a freak? I've got a hump on my mind, or two heads to my soul, or something quite horrid and abnormal. I feel it when I'm among nice, comfortable, normal people—I feel it all the time. I know they think me odd—I know I am odd. Don't laugh—it's quite solemn, really. It's a sort of—" he hesitated—"a sort of deformity. There are people who haven't got the proper number of skins, so that a touch makes them bleed. Well—I'm like that. My soul is a skin short."

He stopped, with a questioning glance, as though fearing that she would laugh at a singularly fantastic piece of description. But she did not laugh—she did not even wish to laugh. She saw, in one swift flash of insight, the truth which lay beneath the fantasy; she knew that in those few brief sentences Guy had described himself as no one else would ever be able to describe him.

"I'm a freak," he said again, in a low voice, as though speaking to himself. "And I hate freaks. It's horrible!"

Sudden pity and compunction struck her to the heart. Horrible—yes, he was right, it was horrible. Who was she, who was Julian, mere, ordinary, coarse-grained, normal people, that

they should judge Guy, the abnormal, that they should call him foolish, or—as she had done a few moments ago—unkind? Was it mere fantastic fastidiousness that made him go away when Kitty Fellowes was present? Was it mere unkindness? Or was it not rather something much finer and deeper than their own callous acceptance of the ugliness, the deformity of things—the cry of a spirit full of beauty itself, which would accept nothing but beauty from those around it? When she had told Julian that Guy cared for beauty so much that he would hate even her if she were to become ugly, should she not really have spoken not in blame but in praise? She had judged Guy harshly, for the defects of his qualities, because, in her blindness and stupidity, she had not been able to appreciate those qualities at their true worth.

“No—you’re not a freak,” she said quickly. “It is we who are all freaks. Forgive me, Guy—I ought not to have spoken to Julian as I did. I’m sorry.”

He looked at her in surprise.

“A freak? You?” Suddenly he came close to her, and his half-whimsical gravity became real, his half-careless tone changed and shook.

“You must never say that,” he said, almost angrily. “You’re what stands to me for perfection in this ugly thing we call life. You’re the only person I ever met who seemed to me at once absolutely normal and absolutely perfect. If anything happened to alter me, or to alter you, I couldn’t bear it. I can’t make compromises with existence, I must be either perfectly happy, or perfectly miserable. I don’t know how to do things by halves. I don’t just want to go through the world eating good dinners, and being comfortable, like the nice, ordinary creature I’m not, and never shall be. I want to be absolutely happy—to have a life of my own, a life that belongs only to you and me, Grace, to make what we choose of—a life that shall have nothing in it but what is beautiful, and in which ugliness of any kind shall be an unseen thing.”

He spoke with a strange fire, a conviction before which she suddenly felt very helpless. It was as though he asked her for the moon, and she knew that she could not give it to him. Also she knew that if he wanted the moon, he would never be satisfied with anything else.

“Oh, Guy, it’s impossible,” she said, looking at him with a kind of fear. “You’re asking

too much. That wouldn't be life at all—it would be a fairy tale!”

For a moment it seemed to her that he was about to answer her angrily. Then the smile came back into his eyes, the old, irresponsible lightness to his voice. Only, behind the smile, behind the lightness, she felt that he was still in earnest, and that beneath the fantasy of his words lay a fundamental and almost fanatical determination which she was powerless to alter.

“Well—why not? Why shouldn't it be a fairy tale?” he asked, laughing. “Are you too old to believe in fairies, Grace? I'm not—I hope I never shall be. There—run and dress. You'll be late for dinner, and Aunt Georgie will swear it's my fault.”

After she had gone, he stood where she had left him, looking after her.

“It ought not to be impossible—it isn't impossible,” he said to himself. “It can't be—with her.” And, half unconsciously, he repeated the words which had struck such a chill to the heart of this girl who loved him, and whom he loved, in his own way, better than anything in the world. “A life that shall have nothing in it but what is beautiful, and in which ugliness of any kind shall be an unseen thing.”

## II

It was perhaps in accordance with the usual irony of things that the Kents, who were very new and very rich, and had never in their lives done anything memorable, should have sprung into sudden notoriety which became almost fame through that one dance to which Grace Strange and Guy Hilmour went that evening. People remembered afterwards that what happened took place "the day after the Kents' second dance." They repeated the phrase until the Kents' second dance took on, in retrospect, the air of an event of the season. It became even rather smart to have been at this fateful entertainment—or, at any rate, not to say that you had been elsewhere on that particular night. A week after the Kents' second dance very select ladies who considered Mrs Kent rather an impossible person did not, at the mere mention of her name, look sweetly into space and remark that she was not in their set. This attitude was significant. It almost seemed to prove the truthfulness of the saying that de-



clares that it is indeed an ill wind which blows nobody good. The ill wind which blew on the morning after the Kents' second dance blew poor, unconscious Mrs Kent straight into that hitherto impregnable fortress which had resisted all her assaults and all her blandishments. Not a dozen hours after the last guest departed in the chill grey of a London dawn, Mrs Kent had made good her entrance into the Upper Circle. Society, with a big S., recognised her existence, for the sake of her "second dance."

It did not appear very memorable at the time. Julian Strange went with a heavy heart, and was frankly bored; Grace went, with the radiant air which still hid considerable anxiety of spirit; Guy Hilmour went, in a wild mood of exultation which he was at no pains to hide; Lady Strange went, full of languid astonishment at the spectacle of her hostess in white satin and diamonds, looking extraordinarily like a white satin cushion in a jeweller's window, stuck all over with winking ornaments. Poor Mrs Kent had told everyone, with ostentatious naïveté, that her second dance was "quite a little thing, you know," but in the end it proved rather gorgeous, with quite a few second-rate tiaras, who all seemed a little shy of each other, as



though conscious that they should not have been there. Lady Strange tolerated Mrs Kent for the sake of Guy, who had taken one of his illogical fits of championship for the lady of white satin and diamonds, simply because his own set would not open its arms to receive her. Grace, who was quite incapable of the usual feminine smallnesses, was nice to Mrs Kent, as she was to everyone. Julian went anywhere, when he happened to be in the humour, and nowhere at all, when he wanted to be solitary. To-night he felt that solitude would have driven him mad. Better the sight of Guy's face than that—better to look on at Guy's triumph.

For afterwards even Mrs Kent, who was not imaginative, declared that there had been something about these two young people and their happiness which had impressed her with a sense of foreboding. She did not put it exactly like that. She said she was sure that sort of thing couldn't last—the world wasn't good enough for it. She said it, too, with tears in her eyes—there was a heart hidden away in the jeweller's cushion, after all. She did not think about the ill wind which had blown good to her and her second dance. She was only dimly aware that she had looked in the flesh on a happiness so

great that it had about it something not of earth, something perhaps that was almost of heaven. It was as though an angel had walked that night through the hot, crowded rooms, bringing even to the second-rate tiaras a celestial breath from the heights from which he had come, a vision of something better and more beautiful than social success. And it was as though they had heard next day that this angel, in his radiant immortality, had come ingloriously to a mortal end—as though they had seen a deathless thing, a thing sent down from heaven, lying before them, dead and cold.

Even Guy seemed conscious of something approaching, something which threatened him, but was not able to depress him. Late that night he went up to Julian with the smile which seemed always like a flame of irresistible gaiety which nothing could put out.

“I’m ‘fey,’ Julian,” he said. “My world’s coming to an end to-night. It can’t last. There’s going to be a big smash-up somewhere. And I’m so happy that I don’t even care—I can’t even feel afraid.”

“It’s all nonsense,” Julian returned uncomfortably. “You have as many moods as a woman, Guy.”

“I’ve a great many more than any woman I ever knew, or you either. No—I’m fey.”

He repeated the phrase with an odd sort of emphasis, as though it held for him some unaccountable fascination. He was quite serious, in spite of his smile. Julian knew him well enough to know that he was often most serious when he said the most unreasonable things.

“It’s rubbish,” he said curtly. “Go and dance—go and do anything. Don’t stand there looking at me like that. What on earth are you thinking about now, Guy?”

“I was thinking what form the smash-up would be likely to take. Oh, I say, Julian, it’s a beastly feeling!” he broke out boyishly. “It’s—it’s like seeing your own funeral going past you, and not being able to scream. What shall I do? I can’t bear it!”

“If you will conjure up fantastic horrors, you must put up with the result,” Julian said, thoroughly out of temper. “Good-night—I’m going home to bed, and I advise you to go too.”

Long afterwards he remembered Guy’s look.

“Good-night, old man. You’ll find the world’s gone to pieces when you wake up to-morrow morning,” he said, quite calmly.

Julian went home, and went to bed; but he did not wake up in the morning, for he never went to sleep. Something in Guy's tone, in Guy's face, haunted him unpleasantly. He could not have told exactly what it was, and he called himself absurd and hysterical for thinking about it. It was just like Guy to be in the wildest high spirits one moment and in the depths of despair the next; there was nothing unusual about such a state of things, nothing which should have deprived him of an hour's rest. All his life Guy had been at the extremes of joy or grief. Julian remembered him as a small boy in a plum-coloured velvet suit, in floods of tears over the death of a pet rabbit—tears which Julian, in his superior, properly brought-up British schoolboy fashion, would have died rather than shed, but of which Guy, who was distressingly un-British in many ways, did not seem the least ashamed. He remembered many other occasions upon which Guy had shocked and puzzled and distressed him, as the abnormal will shock and puzzle and distress the normal, so long as the world continues to exist. Guy was so extraordinarily open about his feelings; and his feelings were so many and so very peculiar, that Julian, for the larger part of their

earlier youth, cherished a secret, insurmountable contempt for his cousin which even a more mature appreciation of Guy's gifts and graces had not been quite able to destroy. He was a little contemptuous now, as he tossed and turned through the interminable hours—contemptuous of the man who, with a splendid substance within reach, would still vex himself for what seemed nothing but a shadow. If Grace had cared for him, he told himself with a sigh, shadows and presentiments would have had very little terrors for his imagination. It was late when he got up. He was half through dressing when his man came in, looking discreetly disturbed and sympathetic.

“I beg pardon, sir, but I thought you'd like to know there's been an accident,” he said glibly.

Julian turned sharply, with a face suddenly stern and altered.

“Guy?” he said in a dry voice—a voice that sounded unlike his own, and as though it came from a great distance.

“No, sir—not Mr Hilmour. Miss Strange, sir. They were riding, and her horse took fright and bolted. I hear she's badly hurt, sir,” the man ended, with the morbid satisfaction



which those of his class always seem to find in sudden misfortune.

Julian stood quite still for a moment. He seemed to be once more at Mrs Kent's "little dance," to hear Guy saying, with a fantastic gravity which had suddenly become horrible, "You'll find the world's gone to pieces to-morrow morning."

Yes, it was quite true, after all. Only, unfortunately, it was not Guy's world which had gone to pieces, but his own.

He finished dressing, and went out quickly, through the ugly, grey beginning of the ordinary London day. It did not seem ordinary to him. There was something terrible and sinister about its greyness, its damp, smutty atmosphere, its look of deceitful calm. When he reached his aunt's door, the doctor's carriage was standing there. He went in. Lady Strange, very white and quiet, was in the hall with the doctor. She gave Julian a little, half-unconscious smile.

"So kind of you to come, dear Julian," she said. "Of course you've heard—we're in dreadful distress. But it might be worse—Dr Haye says so. There's some consolation in that, isn't there?"

Julian looked at the doctor in silence. From



the expression of his face, any consolation that might be found in his statement did not seem to amount to much.

“It might be worse, certainly,” Haye said, rather nervously.

He went out rapidly, without looking at Julian. Lady Strange led the way to the big, cheerful breakfast-room, where breakfast stood untouched, and Grace’s clean and empty cup stood in the tray. Julian sat down suddenly, feeling sick and cold. Lady Strange went to her chair, and stood behind it, looking at him with clouded eyes. “I sent to tell Guy the doctor was here,” she said. “I thought Dr Haye might comfort him. I can’t do anything with him—poor, dear Guy, he’s so sensitive, you know. He saw her thrown. He can’t explain how it happened—he is fit for nothing. Guy is so highly strung, isn’t he?”

Julian did not answer. It all seemed to him so horrible—the cheerful room, the silver and china giving back points of light, Lady Strange’s neat little unflurried phrases, his own stupid silence, and the doctor’s lame attempt at consolation. The arrested atmosphere of the house, shaken out of its usual ways by what had happened, seemed to him full of foreboding and despair.

And as he sat there Guy came silently into the room. His face was quite colourless and grey, and there was no light in his eyes. He looked at Lady Strange as though he did not know her, and then at Julian.

“I wanted to tell you,” he said, in a low, perfectly even voice. “It was my fault. There was a beggar—a cripple—close to us, and I pulled up suddenly, and startled Grace’s horse. It was my fault. The beggar was so—so horrible.”

He dropped into a chair at the foot of the table, and hid his face in his hands; and Lady Strange and Julian sat looking at him, unable to speak, unable almost to understand.

### III

Mrs KENT went about with tears in her eyes, bewailing the catastrophe which had rendered her second dance famous. Everybody was very sympathetic, and made inquiries, and sent flowers, and—at last—grew very tired of Grace Strange's illness, as people will grow tired of the happiness or misfortunes of others. Only their own is for ever fresh to them, and for ever full of interest. Grace Strange was a sweet girl, and of course it was dreadfully sad, coming just after her engagement to that charming young Hilmour. Everybody felt that; and everybody, having expressed the feeling a few times, grew bored and changed the subject. Grace Strange as a subject of conversation was played out. London had liked her very well while she could offer it the charm of her brightness and her youth, and the pleasant spectacle of her beauty; now that she could offer it nothing, London went off to seek charm, and brightness, and beauty elsewhere—and, no doubt, to find them.

Grace was left to Lady Strange's puzzled tenderness, to the mechanical kindness of her nurses, to Sir Charles' morning and evening visits, which became, in time, monotonous both to visitor and visited. Sir Charles had never been interesting—it was too late in life for him to acquire that difficult art now. She was left to read passionate, almost despairing letters from Guy, at which she smiled a little, thinking their despair somewhat out of place, since she was recovering surely, if slowly. She had never discussed the cause of the accident with anyone, had never, by a look, by the faintest suggestion of meaning in voice or accent, betrayed the slightest knowledge of the fact that it had been Guy's fault. Lady Strange and Julian kept Guy's confession to themselves, and told each other that Grace had not seen the beggar whose ugly aspect had brought the mishap about. Guy, in the letters he wrote to her, said nothing in the way of explanation. While she was really in danger, he would not leave the house; when she was better, he haunted it at all hours. As soon as she could be brought into the den, Lady Strange suggested, as a matter of course, that Guy should come up to see her.

For the first time in her life, Grace, who had

never done anything surprising, surprised her mother. For she refused, point-blank, to see Guy.

“He hates illness,” she said. “I look a horrid fright, I’m sure—I don’t want him to see me like this.”

Lady Strange stared at her.

“My dear, how extraordinary! Grace, darling, I hope you aren’t growing vain.”

Grace was silent for a moment. In her eyes, fixed upon a book on her knees, was an expression which would have astonished Lady Strange.

“I don’t think I’m—vain,” she said, very slowly. “If Julian comes, will you please let him come up?”

Lady Strange stared harder than ever.

“Julian? But you won’t see Guy! Dearest Grace, I know you are always so sensible, but—*why* Julian?”

“I want him,” Grace said briefly.

“And you don’t mind him thinking you a horrid fright?” Lady Strange murmured, with a maddening attempt at playfulness. Grace laughed suddenly—she could not have told why.

“Julian won’t see what I look like,” she said. “He hasn’t the artistic temperament. And I want to see him.”

So Julian came up. He came many times after that. He brought Guy's flowers, and Guy's messages. He told her what Guy was doing, and thinking of doing. He brought Guy's frantic entreaties to be allowed to come and see her, if only for a moment. Grace listened in silence.

"He hates illness," she repeated, when Julian ended. "He will not care for me—like this. I can't walk across the room yet. When I can do that, he shall come."

On the day when she first tried to walk across the room, Julian was there. He was alone with her. She had been unusually silent that afternoon, and suddenly, without warning, she held out her hand to be helped up from her long chair.

"I want to try and walk," she said. "I don't want to—to do it before anyone else. Give me your arm, Julian."

So, very slowly, with infinite painfulness, she limped round the room, clinging to Julian's arm. She was very lame. When he brought her back to her chair, she dropped into it as though exhausted, and sat for a moment or two without speaking.

"Don't—don't tell Guy," she said at last.



“No.”

They both remembered that she had said she would see Guy when she could walk round the room, but neither referred to the fact.

The days wore on into weeks, and still Guy was shut out. Grace had never tried to walk since the first occasion. She sat in the long chair by the fire and talked to Julian, gaily, quickly, a little feverishly, perhaps. She laughed a good deal at incidents which in themselves were not very laughable; she was always very animated, and very much interested in everything that was going on in the London which was doing so well without her. Gradually an uncomfortable conviction began to take shape in Julian's mind. He felt that some vague barrier was rising up between Grace and him—that she was acting a part meant to deceive him all the time she talked so gaily, and listened with such apparent interest to all he had to say. He felt that behind her gaiety, behind her interest, she was absorbed in something very far removed from any subject under discussion. He wondered sometimes whether she knew that her present condition was Guy's fault; he wondered whether she was, by her refusal to see him, exacting some sort of penalty from Guy. But he did not dare to ask.

She never referred now to her obstinate lameness. It was he who, one day, made an effort and spoke of it.

“You should see a specialist,” he said. “I’ll tell Aunt Georgie—it ought not to go on.”

She made a quick, almost startled movement of refusal.

“How stupid you are, Julian,” she said, more sharply than she had ever spoken to him since the days of their childish quarrels over games or lessons. “I won’t be bothered with specialists—I have told mamma so. I won’t see anybody—I hate being mauled about, and worried. Can’t you give me a little time to get well in?”

“But you have been like this so long——”

“Oh, don’t worry me—don’t worry me!” she cried desperately. “I won’t be bothered, and mauled about.”

He was silent from sheer amazement. She recovered herself in a moment, and laid an appealing hand on his arm.

“Julian, dear, I’m sorry I spoke like that. You’re quite right, but give me a week more—only a week. I’ll be better then, you’ll see—ever so much better.”

But at the end of the week, Julian spoke to Lady Strange about a specialist. In a sort of

sullen gloom, very unlike anything he had ever connected with her, Grace consented to see one.

Julian came to the house next day just after the great man had come and gone. He was shown, not into the den, but into Lady Strange's own room. His aunt was sitting in an odd, collapsed attitude when he entered, as though the life had been struck out of her suddenly, by some violent shock.

"Oh, Julian," she burst out helplessly, "what are we to do—what are we to do? He says she will always be lame—always—always! And I can't tell her—I don't dare to tell her. It will kill her to know, and she must be told."

Julian stood quite still, looking at her tear-stained face, but without seeing it. In that moment he knew that this was what he had expected from the first—he knew, too, of what Grace had thought while she had laughed, and talked, and played her pitiful part so heroically to the last. He understood her pathetic outburst of pettishness when he had suggested the specialist. She had known all the time—and she had shrunk from the moment when her knowledge must become public, she had clung desperately to the uncertainty which was yet no uncertainty to her.

“She will want to know what Sir Henry said,” Lady Strange sobbed.

Julian had never thought himself a coward, but now he felt suddenly cowardly, he felt that he would like to leave the house at once, and never come back. A sort of panic seized him. He turned almost roughly on Lady Strange.

“I can’t tell her—don’t ask me to tell her!”

Lady Strange wiped her eyes slowly, and looked up. Just at that moment, while they faced each other in a sort of silent struggle, someone tapped at the door. It opened, and Kitty Fellowes stood on the threshold, looking in, timidly, but with a great pity written on her small, pale face.

“I ought not to come in,” she said. “I’ve just come down from Grace—Peters told me. I’m so sorry. I felt I must come and tell you just that, before I went. . . . You see, I—I know what it is.”

She came limping across the room, and took Lady Strange’s hand, and kissed her. There were tears in her eyes, and also a comprehension deeper and more bitter than anything which tears could express.

“I—know what it is,” she said again.

And suddenly Lady Strange, who was not a

demonstrative woman, broke into tears again, and clung to the girl standing beside her.

“Oh, Kitty, we can’t tell her—we can’t tell her!” she said.

Kitty Fellowes did not speak for a moment. Then she turned and went to the door. When she reached it, she looked back over her shoulder.

“I think she knows,” she said, in a low voice. “But I will tell her.”

They waited, hearing the lame girl’s uneven tread as she went down the corridor to the den. It seemed to Julian afterwards that they both held their breath while they listened.

In the den, where Grace lay in her long chair by the fire, Kitty Fellowes did her errand. She did it very simply. She knelt down by the long chair, and took Grace’s hand in both her own; and Grace looked up and met her eyes.

“Yes—I know why you’ve come back,” she said, very quietly. “Don’t say any more, Kitty—I know.”

For a long time neither spoke. Grace lay quite still, twisting a ring round and round her finger. It was her engagement ring—a great half-hoop of diamonds and turquoises. And, as they waited, they heard a bell ring, and Guy’s

voice in the hall beyond, and Guy's step, quick and light, passing the door.

Grace sat up and pushed Kitty Fellowes from her. There was a hard look in her face—a look that was almost desperate.

“Go and tell him,” she said. “Tell him what has happened, and—tell him to come to me. I wouldn't let him come before—while there was any hope of my getting better. Now there's none, and I want him to help me to bear it. Kitty, tell him that, will you? Tell him that I can't bear it without him.”

The lame girl hesitated for a second. She knew well enough that Guy avoided her; she knew the reason why.

“Wouldn't it be better if your mother told him, Grace?” she asked, rather timidly.

Grace understood.

“No—I want you to tell him. He won't mind you now,” she said, unconscious, in her own intolerable pain, of the pain she was inflicting on her friend. “He won't mind now—he can't. If I am to be like that—always—he won't mind—it can't make any difference.”

Kitty Fellowes looked at her. Then she went away. Guy was in Lady Strange's room. He turned as she came in, and in his eyes, as



they fell upon her, she read the old, unconquerable repulsion from which she had shrunk so many times before. In spite of the news he had just heard, she read that look in his eyes, and understood it. Lady Strange read it too, and gave a little cry that was half a sob, and put her handkerchief to her face. Julian read it, and rose suddenly from his chair, and faced his cousin with a movement of determination.

“She has sent for you,” he said.

It was as though he ordered Guy to do something, and Guy heard the unspoken command, and moved back suddenly, away from Kitty. She came up to him, and spoke.

“Grace wants you, Mr Hilmour. I was to tell you so—to tell you that she can’t bear it without you.”

Her voice shook a little, but the look of repulsion did not change in Guy’s eyes. He did not move. He was staring at Kitty. Julian, who watched him, knew that he was saying to himself, “This is what Grace will be like now.” A quick anger seized Julian. He went up to Guy, and touched his arm.

“Go to her!” he said. “If you have the least scrap of feeling for anything besides yourself and your own whims and fancies, go to her.

Tell her that she's an angel, and too good for you, or any man—tell her you would rather have her as—as she is than any other woman in the world whole and well. Are you going? Or shall I make you go?"

There was a moment of silence. Lady Strange dropped her handkerchief in her lap, and looked up, half comprehending, half afraid. Kitty waited, her lips set tight, her eyes shining. Julian waited, watching for the moment when Guy should move towards the door.

But Guy did not move. His face was grey and colourless, as it had been on the morning of Grace's accident, when he had confessed that he had frightened her horse. His eyes looked as though the light in them had gone out; and still he stared at Kitty Fellowes, as though fascinated, and in the fascination there was also comparison, and comprehension — comparison with what Grace had been, and comprehension of what Grace now must be.

"Are you going?" Julian said again. The anger had gone out of his voice, and it was very still and cold.

With a sudden, violent movement of fear and horror, Guy turned from Kitty Fellowes. His face was pale, and almost distorted with a look

of dislike and repulsion so intense that it was almost cruel. And those who saw it knew that the repulsion was not for the girl who stood there before them, white and shrinking, but for that other girl whom he could not see, who had said that she could not bear the fate which had fallen upon her without him.

“I’m not going,” Guy said. “I—can’t.”

• • • • •  
In the den, Grace heard his quick, light steps coming along the corridor, and, for one moment hope—the hope she had denied to herself so often—woke in her heart. He was coming—why had she ever doubted him? Of course he would come, of course. . . .

He was just outside the door now. In a moment he would be with her. In a moment this pain which she was enduring would be over for ever. It was not lameness that she minded, if she could keep Guy, and Guy’s love. Surely, surely, she would not have to give up that?

The steps reached the door. There was one sickening second of hesitation. Then—they passed.

She heard them dying away down the corridor. She heard them cross the hall. She heard the front door open—and shut.

Then she lay back in her long chair. She was not conscious of any pain, of any disappointment, of any sort of feeling whatever. It was all over. A fantastic thought came to her that if she were dead she could not feel more absolutely unmoved, more incapable of feeling, more unnaturally cold and still.

It was all over. It seemed to her that something greater than Guy had gone by with those light, hurrying steps which told of the haste to escape, to be free from a tie no longer desired.

Life itself had passed her by with Guy's footsteps; and it seemed to her that she lay there as one dead, and unable to understand the desolation which had fallen upon her—unable even to regret the brief happiness she had lost.



## **II. IT COMES**





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### IV

THE toy train slipped slowly along its single line from Fréjus to Saint-Maure, across the desolate, mosquito-haunted flats along the sands, and on into the wild country, the Côte des Maures, which faces the cheerful little town of Saint-Raphaël across the blue waters of the Gulf of Fréjus as some beautiful Saracen girl of past centuries might face a pretty Parisian basking upon the sunlit *plage*. Civilisation seemed to retreat farther and farther as the train proceeded upon its leisurely way. A desolation which was yet not desolate, but rather luxuriant and smiling, opened before the dusty carriage windows of the train—a desolation of pines and cork-trees, of mountain slopes covered with tall heath and arbutus, of hedges of wild myrtle. On one side a peacock-blue sea lapped softly against rocks of a deep red colour which the sunset would presently turn to crimson; on the other, the steep, green Mon-

tagnes des Maures swept up to a sky of palest turquoise, already tinged with a hint of pink. High above, fantastic clouds shifted before a wind which did not reach the lower levels of the hills, or the railway track along the shore. With every moment the clouds became more fantastic in shape, as the wind bent and twisted them to its will; with every moment the prevailing pink light deepened a little, casting upon the pine-covered hills an odd effect of darkness before the night had fallen, and upon the drifting and distorted clouds a light which changed rapidly from purple to gold.

In a carriage of the creeping train Guy Hilmour sat alone, watching the changing clouds over the sea with a sort of impatient weariness. He was not in any way particularly anxious to arrive at Saint-Maure, but it was torture to him, in his condition of restless misery, to sit motionless in the jolting carriage, and watch one blue and red bay after another glide past in endless procession. The slow progress of the train irritated him. He longed for violence of any sort—violence of movement, of action, perhaps even of speech. The intense colour of the sea—that hard, wonderful, and yet monotonous blue of the Mediterranean—

soothed his eyes a little as he looked at it; the fantastic splendours of the clouds pleased him as he watched them. They looked like a flock of prehistoric monsters fleeing from some unseen terror across the clear plains of heaven. Their shapes, their movements, were almost startlingly lifelike. The strong current of air had detached from their sharp outlines little flying locks of cloud which gave them an appearance of extraordinary haste. The gold and purple light of sunset painted them with gorgeous shades and gradations of colour. Every pressure of the wind which drove them forward twisted them into more wonderful contortious, made them at once more monstrous and more real. At one moment they writhed and snorted flame like a procession of Chinese dragons; at another they became indistinct, mere blurred masses of colour in which a mysterious life seemed yet to move and breathe, and their dragon's tails stretched out like wings, upon which the sunset set here and there splashes of vivid scarlet against feathers of rose and gold. Then again they seemed like a flight of gigantic birds, struggling against a great storm which ruffled their shining plumage, and tore their feathers from their wings in enormous

handfuls which changed, as one looked, to fantastic animals in pursuit. And always, as shape succeeded shape, colour succeeded colour—purple became scarlet, or pink became gold, until the whole sky seemed on fire with radiance reflected from this strange spectacle which moved across it, spilling flame and blood upon the pure, exquisite turquoise of the evening heavens.

Guy, in his corner of the carriage, watched this increasing glory and wonder of the sunset with something of that old, intense enthusiasm which he had always felt for all beautiful things. The gold of the sky found an echo in his eyes, and the grey look which had never left his face since that terrible moment when he had turned from Kitty Fellowes in horror, and sealed Grace's fate and his own, faded away for a moment and was lost. Then some contortion of the shifting clouds reminded him cruelly of that deformity from which he had shrunk all his life with a loathing which seemed almost inhuman. He felt himself shivering, and turned quickly from the sky to the sea. Its hard, metallic blue was splashed with light. Out beyond the curving bays and pine-covered headlands a flotilla of torpedo-boats was moving westward towards

Toulon. There was something at once stealthy and hurried in the aspect of the ugly little vessels, something cowardly, yet important. They looked like assassins despatched upon a deadly errand, proud of their power, yet secretly ashamed of their treachery. A white flicker of foam tore the blue water at their bows, and their wet sides glistened with a faint pink radiance as they seemed to race the train which hastened in the same direction as themselves.

Guy ceased to notice the torpedo-boats. The suffering which had held him in a remorseless grip for the last week claimed its victim once more. For he had suffered—the agony of desertion had not all fallen to Grace. Possibly, indeed, he had suffered more than she had done, as an extraordinarily sensitive nature must suffer more than another not so sensitive. Grace, the deserter, had not known moments so terrible as he, the deserter, had gone through since he had left her, uncomforted, to her fate. Grace, at least, did not at the worst endure the agony of self-contempt into which he had fallen when, his first panic of physical repulsion over, he had fully realised the irrevocable consequences of his own action. Even Julian, who had expressed his opinion of his cousin in a few trenchant



and unforgettable sentences, could not, if he had tried, have expressed Guy's contempt for himself.

For, if Julian had called him a coward and a cad, how much more bitterly had he not realised his cowardice himself! After the first moment of flight he had tried to undo what he had done—he had gone back, he had entreated Grace to see him. She refused, as, in his own mind, he had known that she would refuse. Lady Strange, tearful, uncomprehending—in spite of all that had happened—made intercession for him in vain. Sir Charles, pained and puzzled, asked him if he considered his engagement at an end, and he had denied any breach with a passion which came near to despair. He held Grace to her engagement—he refused to give her up—he would always refuse. Sir Charles, still more puzzled, went to reason with his daughter. He retreated beaten. Grace would not see Guy. And the engagement was absolutely at an end—there was nothing more to be said.

Guy went back to his rooms and spent a hideous night—a night the very remembrance of which made him shudder. He had heard men say they had been in hell—that night he understood what they meant. It seemed to him

that everything which had held his life together had been swept away in one moment, not only his happiness, but his self-respect, not only the woman he loved, but, in a way, that part of himself which he loved, as well. Before, he had seen himself, as he had told Grace, as a sort of freak—too sensitive, too easily swayed this way or that by every impulse, and with a fantastic hatred of ugliness which was, or seemed to be, more than half atoned for by a real and sincere passion for beauty ; but now he saw himself as a leper, as a thing afflicted with a terrible disease, not of the body but of the mind—or rather, perhaps, a disease which left no apparent trace upon either, though it affected both. This unnatural physical shrinking from anything hurt or deformed had, in the moment when he refused to go to Grace, assumed proportions not merely physical, but spiritual as well. He told himself that it is not possible to hate with the body alone—that such hatred as he felt for deformity must be of the soul as well ; and he knew that he did not only shrink from the thought of Grace as she was now—he hated that thought, with a personal and definite hatred. If he saw Grace, it was possible that he might hate her too, and the

idea filled him with a sort of horror before which all else was as nothing.

He thought afterwards that, if he had had any tendency to madness, he should have gone mad that night. Perhaps the worst part of his suffering was the fact that he did not suffer blindly, that in the midst of his despair he developed an almost terrifying capacity for self-analysis, for self-comprehension. It was not enough that he should feel intensely; he must know also exactly what he felt, he must understand every separate pang of shame or fear. Nothing was spared him. He had always had an uncomfortable faculty for seeing into the minds of other people; now, with a kind of inverted clairvoyance, he saw into his own.

How he lived through the hours immediately after his refusal to go to Grace he never afterwards knew. Next morning came a piteous note from Lady Strange, reiterating Grace's refusal to see him, Grace's declaration that the engagement was at an end. He had a moment of desperate relief, followed by another agony of self-contempt. Then the unequal conflict began again. He went to Lady Strange, he begged to be allowed to see Grace, even against her will. Here the doctor had to be consulted,

however, and he forbade anything of the kind. It was all over. Grace's heart seemed shut as closely as her door. She would not see Guy—she would not mention his name. It was an extraordinary ending to the happiness which had blazed up like a flame from heaven on the night of Mrs Kent's second dance.

And, while Guy still struggled against his sentence of banishment, a way of escape was opened to him. His father sent for him from Saint-Maure. The summons itself was something of a surprise. Guy had been born at Saint-Maure, but he had left it as a baby a few months old, and had never returned. His mother lived there nearly all the year round, on the plea of delicate health, in which no one seemed very much to believe. Once or twice she came to London in the height of the season, and opened Hilmour House, and gave one or two very splendid and rather glacial entertainments. Then the house was shut up again, and she returned to Mon Paradis, the lovely villa at Saint-Maure from which she could not be parted for more than a short time. She was a fragile-looking woman whom most people found unsympathetic and who, in spite of her fragility, had somehow an odd air of decision,

of resolution so silent, yet so inflexible as to invest her with an atmosphere almost heroic. She had been a great beauty in her youth, and Guy had inherited some of her beauty and much of her charm, but he felt always that she did not love him, and he always understood what people meant when they said that she was unsympathetic. His mother had always been a stranger to him, not so much because he seldom saw her, but rather because when he did see her she always seemed a great distance away from him. When he spoke to her, it was with the sensation of speaking to a person on the farther side of an unfathomable abyss. With his father he had very little in common. Lord Francheville had always enjoyed the reputation of being devoted to his wife, and to nothing else; he was certainly not devoted to Guy. He followed his wife about so closely and so constantly that a reflection of her pale inflexibility seemed to have fallen upon him. On the rare occasions when they both appeared at Hilmour House, he had an air even more detached than hers. They looked like a pair of spectres who had found their way back to earth, and could not get over the shock of



finding themselves once more among the living, instead of among the dead.

Considering the unsympathetic nature of his immediate relations, it is hardly to be wondered at that Guy gave all his affection to the Stranges. Lady Strange was his father's first cousin, though he always called her his aunt. She belonged to the more lively and less remote sort of Hilmour, of which Guy's grandfather, the old Earl of Newtown, still remained a striking specimen, in spite of his eighty-four winters, his gout, and a perfectly frank and uncontrollable cynicism which spared nothing within his reach. The old man was as fond of Guy as he permitted himself to become of anything calling itself human. But he too lived mostly abroad, notwithstanding his age, and made no secret of the open detestation in which he held his native land and all its habits and customs. When he came to England, it was an understood thing that Guy should go to him at once, and mitigate the hardships of his sojourn in the country he disliked so heartily; but when he wanted Guy to come to him abroad, his grandson was usually engaged in more congenial gaieties with some of the Stranges. It was remarkable that Lord Newtown, though fond



of the Continent, never seemed to extend his wanderings to Saint-Maure and Mon Paradis.

“When people give a name like that to the place they live in,” he said once to Guy, “you may depend upon it, they are only trying to hide a particularly large and obnoxious sort of family skeleton. Mon Paradis, indeed! I have spent forty years, my dear boy, in wondering whether the villa bears that ridiculous name because your excellent father beats his wife, or your equally admirable mother henpecks her husband.”

Guy had laughed at the old man's speech. It made very little impression on his mind, because he knew that Lord Newtown, like many other people, did not much respect the truth when he saw an opportunity of being amusing. Also, he was sure that his father and mother were devoted to each other, and said so; at which Lord Newtown chuckled unbelievably, and there the matter ended.

But to-day, as the train carried him towards Saint-Maure, he remembered the old man's remark, in the midst of his own torturing reflections. It sprang up in his mind suddenly, without warning, and with something of a shock. It occurred to him that, if one had a family skeleton to hide, it would be difficult to

find a more successful retreat for it than in this wild, pine-covered country, this Côte des Maures, with its savage beauty, its desolate tracts of heath and arbutus and cork-trees.

The idea passed through his mind, and startled him for a moment, and then was lost in the whirlpool of his own miserable reflections.

The train pressed on, puffing after the torpedo-boats, now far away upon the intense blue of the sea, upon which night was beginning to descend visibly, like a thing falling, as it does in southern lands. Guy looked up. The wind which had pursued and contorted the clouds over the sea had ceased to drive them forward, to torture them into the shapes of flying monsters. They stood still over the clear water, against a sky from which the violent glories of sunset had faded into a pale, sharp green, like the green of chrysoprase. The distorting currents had abandoned them, and, as though in triumph, they had spread themselves out across the whole extent of the sky in a form more strange and beautiful than any which the wind had made of them. The snorting dragons and struggling birds had vanished. In their place a great pair of wings

stretched from the sea to the highest heaven — wings large enough to support legions of angels, or lift the earth nearer to the sky.

The effect of these enormous pinions which supported nothing was strange and beautiful in the extreme. The purples and pinks and scarlets of the sunset were dead. Only, as Guy looked, a slow, infinite glory of gold caught the wings, and grew upon them, until they blazed like two flames against the colourless sky.

He forgot his own sorrows as he looked. What were they bearing upward, as they rose slowly higher and higher through the sky? Were they merely the wings of an angel who remained invisible, or did they bear the soul of one of the cloud monsters, its terrors and contortions over, its hideousness blotted out, a little nearer to the glory of sunset and sunrise, the infinite beauty which is enthroned in the blue depths of heaven?

A SMART English dogcart with a French groom was waiting at the wild little station of Saint-Maure. The two households of Mon Paradis and Hilmour House had always been quite distinct. The Franchevilles never took any of their English servants abroad with them, nor brought any of their French servants to England. When Mon Paradis had been built, before Lord Francheville's marriage, more than forty years ago, he had exported to Saint-Maure his own valet, who had remained with him ever since, though he never seemed to leave the beautiful villa. When Lord Francheville's intimate friends or relations inquired after Spence, who had been with him for some years before his marriage, they were always told that Spence's health, like that of Lady Francheville, did not permit of a long visit to England. Lord Newtown, on receiving this reply, had once been heard to describe it as nonsense, and ask what his son and heir was thinking about. But the old man was occasionally testy, and if

his son chose to pamper his servants, it was nobody's business but his own.

Guy, on this occasion, had been particularly requested to bring no one with him, as the accommodation was limited, and Spence's services would be at his disposal. The request had struck him as a little singular at the moment, but he had been too much absorbed in his own troubles to give it a second thought. Now, as he sat beside the French groom in the dogcart, whirling along the picturesque quay with its clustering fishing-boats and its outlook upon the Gulf of Hyères, he suddenly remembered it; and again it struck him as odd. He glanced at the groom, and inquired generally after the health of the establishment at Mon Paradis.

"Milord is not so well, monsieur," the groom replied, rather indifferently, "and milady—she suffers always."

Guy wondered vaguely in what way his mother suffered always; he had heard of her delicate health ever since he could remember, but he had not noticed any particular signs of it when in her society.

"This is a beautiful part of the world," he said, pursuing the subject, not because it interested him, but because he was tired of his

own thoughts, and wished to talk. "One ought to be well here—and happy."

He spoke regretfully, looking at the blue gulf, at the hills beyond, at the lights of Saint-Tropez, which were beginning to sparkle on the opposite shore. He had planned a winter honeymoon along this coast, a surprise visit to Mon Paradis, which he had always wished to see, and the memory of his plans, which had ended so tragically, brought a sudden sadness into his voice.

The groom turned his head a little, and looked at him curiously, he thought, with a sort of pitying scrutiny which he did not understand.

"But it is not the place which makes happiness, monsieur," he said gravely. "One calls it Mon Paradis, if one chooses—that is another thing. One cannot make it Paradise—no?"

"Perhaps not. But it is so beautiful—surely it would be difficult to be unhappy here."

"Yes—if beauty made happiness, it would be difficult to be unhappy in Saint-Maure."

The man's tone was at once meditative and suggestive, as he turned his attention once more to his horse. Guy did not answer at once. He was turning the remark, and its implied meaning, over and over in his mind. If beauty made happiness?—to him, it had



always made the only sort of happiness he knew. Beauty had been the thing he worshipped, ugliness, of any kind, he had abhorred. And he had told himself all his life that this worship of beauty, this detestation of its reverse, was in itself beautiful, like a vague, mystical sort of religion which consists mainly of lofty, if indefinite, aspirations and artistic vestments and ceremonies which are remarkable for the fact that they do not belong to any known form of faith.

Yet the man sitting beside him, who probably had very little knowledge of anything but horses, had seemed to imply a very strong doubt as to the power of beautiful things to cause happiness.

Somehow, the remark, and what it implied, lingered in Guy's mind, and would not be banished. He said no more, but sat watching night deepen swiftly over the gulf. The lights of Saint-Tropez seemed to flutter like a cloud of fireflies against the darkness beyond. A cool wind came in from the water, and made the fishing-boats rock softly against the quay, and fluttered the leaves of the trees which grew upon it, under which children were playing in the clear dusk. From the bare, ugly, towerless little chapel, yellow in the gloom, inex-

pressibly shabby and sunburnt, as most of these South of France churches are, a bell began to ring for service. In the open air, the dying light, the exquisite ending of a perfect day, there was something sweet and perhaps melancholy in the small, silver voice of the bell, calling its faint summons to the whispering sea, and to the sunset which lay dead behind the hills. For no one responded to its call, no one seemed even to hear it. The loungers still leaned talking over the stone wall of the quay, the children still played under the trees. It was as though the little bell cried to a world which had forgotten it with a tongue which no one cared to hear.

They left the church behind them, and turned along the road which runs beside the shore. White villas flashed past them, gay with windows in which lights were beginning to glow with a warm and homelike radiance. Guy began to feel like a man in a strange land, who sees everywhere the homes of others and knows that his own is far away. This drive through the dusk, beside the dark sea, became mysterious, and put on almost the air of some romantic adventure. The night had fallen over the land, though far out at sea the water still glowed faintly, as though the sunset still

lingered there. A bat flickered to and fro over the dogcart, coming and going with restless, velvet flight, and a frog was croaking hoarsely somewhere in the distance. The church bell had ceased to ring, and an intense silence descended upon the white road, the wild, curving shore, the sea which slept below. The villas had been left far behind. They were out in the open country, among twisted shadows which were pines and bent shadows which were olive-trees. Guy told himself that he would never have mistaken the olives for any tree less venerable, so bowed and withered was their appearance, so hopelessly, helplessly old. As they fled by, they seemed like a procession of patriarchs disappearing into the night of ages.

And presently the groom broke the silence, and pointed ahead with his whip.

“We are near Mon Paradis now, monsieur. The low white wall shows where the grounds begin.”

The low white wall was on their right, between them and the sea, for the road had curved inland a little, so that pines and cork-trees were on each side of it. Now the pines and cork-trees became palms, lifting feathery heads dimly through the gloom, beyond the white-

ness of the wall which marked the boundaries of Mon Paradis. They looked like kings of the East who had strayed into exile beside the sleeping Mediterranean, and kept, even in exile, their splendid and impassive dignity. Their shadows painted the road with sudden blackness, through which the dogcart moved almost silently, and more slowly than it had done before. On the other side of the road another white ribbon of rail appeared, above which rose another long row of palms. By this avenue of palms, in darkness, in silence, Guy approached the place in which he had been born.

The dogcart turned under an elaborate white gateway into gardens in which the air was heavy with the scent of flowers. Hedges of purple heliotrope ran along the drive, so close to the wheels that Guy could see the colour of the flowers in the dusk. Sharp, aromatic odours came from pines and shrubs, and the fragrance of roses and myrtles floated everywhere. Great trumpet-flowers of scarlet climbed over the heliotrope hedges, and hung down upon the drive, almost before the horse's feet. And somewhere in the distance a peacock, disturbed perhaps by the sound of wheels, sent up a harsh, unearthly cry of anger or fear.

Suddenly the hedges ended. The drive continued across a great sweep of turf, beyond which rose the fantastic outlines of a house, or rather, from its appearance, a Moorish palace of carved and tinted ivory. Guy drew a sharp breath of admiration as this exquisite, unexpected marvel grew in a moment out of the night, with a swiftness which almost suggested enchantment. Memories of the Arabian Nights woke in his brain. Over him, against the pure darkness of the Southern sky, rounded domes and delicate minarets rose in a seeming confusion which was in reality a very harmony of order and arrangement. It was all dark, pale and ghostlike in the warm gloom of the night; but in one tower which hung above the others like a pearl a faint light seemed to burn in a window from which the curtain had been drawn back. Guy, whose eyes had grown accustomed to the dark, looked at the tower and its lighted window with a sudden eagerness. They seemed to him strange and dramatic in the silence and gloom of this fairy palace.

“It is beautiful!” he said aloud. “Perfectly and absolutely beautiful! No wonder they called it Mon Paradis.”

Again the groom shot at him that odd, scru-



tinising, pitying look ; but this time he did not notice it. He was looking at the lighted window in the tower.

“It is very odd,” he said. “Is that window barred? I think I can see bars across it, but perhaps the light dazzles my eyes.”

The horse plunged forward with violence, as though before a blow. The groom made a movement as though disconcerted, but whether by the question or the caprice of the horse Guy could not tell. As they drew up before the deep porch he said, in a tone which sounded suddenly alarmed, and almost distressed :

“Yes—it is beautiful, monsieur—very beautiful. It is a place made to be a heaven on earth—it is well named Mon Paradis, as monsieur says.”

Guy, as he sprang stiffly from the step of the dogcart to the ground, remembered, in an odd flash of recollection, how the man had said to him, by the quay of Saint-Maure, that it was one thing to call a place a paradise, and another to make it one ; and he felt sure that the groom disliked Mon Paradis and everything in it—that he did more than dislike it, that he hated it. And he wondered why.



## VI

Guy slept well and naturally that night, for the first time since Grace had broken off the engagement. The beauty of Mon Paradis had in some indirect way soothed his excited nerves, and quieted his wearied brain. The blue peace of the sea, asleep in the moonlight, the loveliness of the gardens, the scent of flowers and murmur of waters, made up a spell which mastered him, in spite of himself. The agony of self-contempt which had tortured him grew more bearable, the thought of Grace retreated into the background, and he was content to gaze and wonder and admire. He dined alone with his father in a little pavilion on the terrace which looked straight out to sea. It was a silent meal, but Guy was too much absorbed in his surroundings to notice the silence. Lady Francheville did not appear, and he was told that she was unwell, and could not see him until the morning. He offered, not very eagerly, to go up and see her, and saw that Lord Francheville, for some reason, did not find the offer acceptable. Guy was not surprised.

His mother had never shown much desire for his society, and she had always seemed to him a being so wholly apart, so remote from ordinary human ties and affections, that he did not resent this apparent want of natural feeling. Lord Francheville was not a lively companion, at the best of times. That night he seemed to Guy more silent, more abstracted than usual, though he paid no particular attention to the fact. Once or twice, when the servants had left the pavilion, and they were alone, he looked up at his son quickly, with an odd, arrested expression, as though he wished to make some remark which it was difficult to put into words. His thin features wore the half-dreamy, half-haggard look which they had worn ever since Guy remembered him, and his hair, as the lamplight shone upon it, was white as snow. In the midst of his admiration for the beauty around him, Guy found time to wonder why his father, who was not an old man, should wear that look—the look of one crushed under a burden too heavy for his strength, which he is not able to lay down. Lord Newtown, at eighty-four, looked younger than his son, in spite of his gout and his cynicism, and a bewildering assortment of violent dislikes, which kept him always occupied with a

perfectly incomprehensible series of quarrels. Perhaps the quarrels kept him young, as he occasionally declared they did. It occurred to Guy that his father was in need of some tonic to rouse him from the harassed torpor into which he seemed to have fallen.

Nothing was said about Grace, or the broken engagement, though Guy felt that his father knew that something was wrong. He was grateful to him for saying nothing, and cut short their smoke on the terrace on the plea that he was tired and must turn in early. But when he reached his own room, he did not go to bed, but sat for a long time looking out at the sea.

He was too tired to think, too tired even to feel. The peace, the beauty of what he saw was so perfect that it seemed to rest him. He was worn out by the violent emotions of the last week, and in that state of mental and physical exhaustion in which it seems as impossible to feel as to move. And he remembered his impression that the groom who had driven him from Saint-Maure hated Mon Paradis, and was conscious of something like amusement. No doubt he had been wrong—he had been tired, and had made a mistake. Who could dislike a spot so absolutely lovely?

For a long time he could not tear himself from the window. The night was extraordinarily still, extraordinarily cloudless. There was not a sound to be heard anywhere.

When at last he went to bed, he did not fall asleep at once. He had left the window open, regardless of mosquitoes, and the moonlight flooded the room. He lay looking at it, finding a sort of idle pleasure in the occupation.

The household had long been silent. Suddenly, in the stillness, he was conscious of a sound—the soft unmistakable sound of a woman's heels tapping upon an uncarpeted flight of stairs, of a woman's dress brushing lightly from step to step.

Guy's ear was quick. He recognised the step at once. It was Lady Francheville's.

It struck him that perhaps she wanted to see him, that she had come to listen at his door. He got up softly, and went to the door, and opened it.

Lady Francheville stood just outside the door, with a small hand-lamp which she was holding up above her head, in order to throw a light before her down the dark well of the staircase. She had evidently just come down from the storey above that in which Guy's room was situated—and she had certainly had no intention of making a midnight visit to Guy. The face

she raised to his was astonished, and, he felt also, a little disconcerted. It was as though he had surprised her upon some errand which she wished to keep secret.

“I beg your pardon,” he said involuntarily. “I—I thought you were coming to my room.”

Lady Francheville’s pale, inflexible features expressed a mild surprise, and Guy regretted his remark. He remembered that his mother was not in the habit of doing impulsive or affectionate things, and it struck him that she secretly resented the suggestion that she was about to do anything of the sort now, much as she would have resented it had anyone taken a liberty with her.

“I was not coming to you,” she said a little coldly. Then her manner changed slightly. “I am sorry I could not come down to-night. I hope you have everything you want?”

“Everything, thanks—more than I could possibly want. This place is perfectly beautiful—I am in love with it. Why have I never come here before?”

Lady Francheville had lowered the lamp, but its light was still on her face. Guy, looking at her, saw it change, saw a look of pain come into her eyes. He was reminded suddenly of the



groom, and of his remark that it was not the place in which one lived that made happiness ; for Lady Francheville, though she lived in Mon Paradis, did not look happy—did not, indeed, look as though she had ever known what happiness was.

“I must go down,” she said, without answering his question. “We shall have plenty of time to talk in the morning. You look tired. Good-night, Guy.”

“Good-night.”

He stood at the open door, and watched her tall figure moving down the staircase into the darkness below with a sort of rigid grace, a dignity which was not merely calm but frozen. It occurred to him as he stood there that he had never known a woman who created round her an atmosphere so absolutely cold, so peculiarly devoid of all human warmth of feeling. And suddenly he wondered whether his father’s look of unutterable weariness was caused by the fact that for forty years he had lived with this beautiful iceberg. It might be so, he thought. He had often been told that his father and mother were devoted to each other, but at that moment he felt inclined to doubt Lady Francheville’s capacity for devotion of any sort, to any created being in heaven or earth.



He went back to his room, and fell asleep almost in a moment. He was awakened by sunshine and sweet, blowing air—glorious light, and a wind sweet with the breath of pines and roses. His breakfast stood beside the bed, and someone was moving about the room in a velvety, silent way which he felt rather than heard.

Guy sat up yawning among his pillows. A small, mouselike man came to the foot of the bed, and smiled a small, discreet, respectful smile.

“Good-morning, sir. You were sleeping so sweetly, it seemed a sin to wake you. It’s a warm day—shall I put out the white suit?”

“Oh—you’re Spence?” Guy said.

“Yes, sir. I remember you as a baby, Master Guy—I beg pardon, sir, it seems natural to call you that, somehow. You were a pretty baby, sir, as ever I see——” and Spence sighed suddenly, and began unfolding the white linen suit.

Guy laughed. It was the first time he had laughed spontaneously since the day he had abandoned Grace, but Spence’s sentimental tone when referring to his own youthful charms was too much for him.

“I expect I was a little beast!” he said

gaily. "I say, Spence, I'm glad to see you—I've heard a lot about you, you know. I always wondered why you stayed out here all the time, and never came home, but now I've seen this place, I begin to understand. You'll never get rid of me again—I shall stay here until I go to pieces."

Spence's grey, mouselike head was bent over the linen suit. He did not raise it when he spoke. His voice sounded suddenly grave.

"I hope not, sir. We should be glad to have you, I'm sure—but I hope not."

Guy felt startled. Spence's tone, like that of the French groom, was unmistakable.

"What, don't you like Mon Paradis, either?"

"It's a beautiful spot, sir—the most beautiful spot you'll find in the world, I think. And I've travelled a deal with his lordship when he was younger."

"But you don't like it? That's odd. The man who drove me from Saint-Maure didn't like it either, I do believe."

Spence looked up sharply.

"Those Frenchmen are a silly lot, sir. Don't pay any attention to what they say—they're full of silliness."

"But your silliness takes the same form,

Spence. Why on earth don't you like Mon Paradis?"

Spence hesitated.

"Well—I suppose I'm fonder of old England than of these lovely foreign places, sir. That's about it. It's natural, after all."

He busied himself with Guy's things, and Guy drank his coffee, and watched him. He was thinking deeply, and perhaps the burden of his thoughts was not altogether comfortable. For it was natural that Spence should like England better than France; but he felt quite certain that he had another and a better reason than that for disliking Mon Paradis. What was it? Had this modern Paradise also a serpent of evil and mystery hidden in the shadow of its palms and roses?

Presently Guy put down his cup and spoke again.

"Who sleeps over me, Spence?"

This time it was evident that Spence was surprised and disconcerted.

"No one, sir. The rooms over you are empty," he said briefly, and his tone did not invite further questioning.

It occurred to Guy that it was a little odd that Lady Francheville should have visited an empty

suite of rooms in the middle of the night at a time when she was supposed to be too much indisposed to see her son. But he could not very well discuss his mother's apparently eccentric behaviour with Spence. He was silent, watching the little man move about the room. There was something restful, and even attractive, in his noiseless movements, and the gentle expression of his rather insignificant features; but it was not for that reason that Guy watched him. A fantastic idea was taking shape in his mind. It seemed to him that between Lord and Lady Francheville and this little, mouselike man, their old servant, there was an odd resemblance—a resemblance which had nothing to do with appearance, or with manner, or with speech, but which existed nevertheless, and was not only recognisable but striking. The look which he had seen on his father's face as he walked with him up and down the terrace, and on his mother's face as she stood talking to him on the dark staircase, with the lamp in her hand—the look born of a great and heavy load carried perhaps bravely but certainly hopelessly, with a breaking heart—this look was on the face of this little man also. It was a look difficult to describe, but, once seen, it could not be forgotten, or

mistaken. And it was so strong, and so unlike any other expression that Guy had ever seen, that it constituted a likeness which was almost ridiculous between these three people who, in all other respects, did not resemble each other in the least.

Guy tried to put this likeness into words, to analyse it, to discover its cause, and could not. Only it seemed to him that it was the likeness which might grow in time between three people who have looked for long on the same thing, and that a thing which has filled them all with the same emotions, the same sorrow, and pity, and perhaps fear. And the more he thought of it, the more firmly did he become convinced that this explanation, however fantastic it might appear at first sight, was in reality the true one. The resemblance between his father and mother and Spence was the resemblance, not of those who see, but of the thing seen.

But upon what had they looked, these three, that the sight of it had set them apart from all others, and sealed them with a sorrow to which one could not put a name—a sorrow at once terrible and pitiful—a pity which was akin to a great fear?

## VII

LIFE at Mon Paradis was quiet, and solitary. Lord and Lady Francheville did not encourage visitors. No one came over from Nice, or Cannes, or Saint-Raphaël, though people whom they knew well were staying at all these places, as Guy knew, and it would have seemed perfectly natural had they chosen to appear at Saint-Maure. Lord Newtown wrote to his grandson from Monte Carlo—a characteristic letter. The place was full of his bitterest enemies, but Guy might come over and see him if he liked; no doubt Paradise was boring him to distraction. Guy went over, and found the old man in a bad temper. He abused his enemies and his friends with charming impartiality. Everyone was detestable. He did not know why he had not stayed in Paris. And what the devil had Guy been up to about his engagement? He didn't believe that Grace had given him up—no girl in her senses would give up the prospect of becoming Countess of Newtown, so it was no use to talk about it. What had Guy done?



Guy was aware that by no effort of his could Lord Newtown ever be made to understand what had really happened. He murmured something vague and unsatisfactory, and his grandfather retorted frankly that he did not believe a word he said.

“It’s your fault, of course,” he said. “The girl’s a good girl—as good a girl as I know. And, by Jove, as handsome as she is good! What do you want more, you ungrateful young ruffian, you—eh?”

Guy murmured humbly that he did not want anything—that Grace was far too good for him, and he knew it, and that he only hoped the misunderstanding would be cleared up. Upon which Lord Newtown took a letter from his pocket, which he threw at, rather than gave to, his grandson.

“You had better read that,” he said savagely. “I saw her myself—did what I could for you, though you don’t deserve it. Said you were a damned young fool—all the Hilmours are, until they become damned old ones, like me. Told her you didn’t mean it—thought you really cared for her, though that sort of thing is all moonshine and imagination, of course. Still, women like to be told it isn’t—or did, when I was young.”

“It was very good of you,” Guy said, touched by this unusual show of interest in his tangled affairs. He took the letter and opened it with a sinking heart; and Lord Newtown rang for his man, and his afternoon dose of medicine, and swore loudly at both.

The letter was very brief—a dozen lines dashed upon a sheet of paper, without commencement, without signature. She would not write his name and hers on the same sheet of paper, he thought bitterly, and perhaps he was right. It was all over—she hoped he would not try to see her, or write to her, for it was useless. She understood perfectly what had happened—there was no need for him to apologise or explain. Their engagement was an utter mistake, and they would only have made each other unhappy; it was a good thing they had found out their real sentiments in time. And, since it would be impossible for them to avoid meeting in other people’s houses, if not in their own, she hoped he would never refer to the subject again.

Guy laid the letter down with a feeling of bewilderment so intense that it was absolutely painful. For the letter was hard—almost flippant; and when had Grace been hard or

flippant before? For a moment he thought of his grandfather's assertion that no girl in her senses would renounce the chance of being Countess of Newtown, and wondered. Had not Grace really cared for him, after all? Had she merely accepted him because he was what is called a good match? The thought was really rather dreadful, and passed as quickly as it came. No—Grace was not mercenary, and if she had been so, he knew that he would have detected it at once.

“Well?”

Lord Newtown had swallowed his medicine, and consigned his man to a locality much warmer even than Monte Carlo. He looked at Guy expectantly, and Guy avoided his eye.

“It is no use,” he said. “She wishes it to end—what can I do?”

He was conscious that in the midst of his very real distress there was also a relief which was very real too. He had done what he could to redeem that fatal first moment of panic. Was it his fault if his repentance was not accepted? He was beginning to think that he had not behaved so badly after all. If he had refused to go to Grace once he had begged for days to be allowed to go to her—and begged

in vain. Was he to be judged and condemned on the impulse of one unfortunate moment, rather than the continued effort of days? He had done what he could—he could do no more. Honour was satisfied. If Grace wished the engagement to end, it must end, for it was clear that he could not force her to remain engaged to him against her will.

“You’re glad,” Lord Newtown said abruptly.

“No!” For the first time in his life Guy lost his temper with his grandfather. “You have no right to say that. I am not glad.”

Lord Newtown laughed in his cynical, cackling way.

“My dear boy, why try to blind me with conventional lies? Do you think I have never seen relief written on a man’s face before? You are relieved because Grace has given you up—yes, and you’re glad too; and if I wasn’t too philosophical to be annoyed by anything, I should be ashamed of you.”

As Lord Newtown’s philosophy had never yet stood in the way of his losing a very bad temper on every possible occasion, Guy rose and made his escape. He did not want to quarrel with the old man, who had always been kind to him.

He went back to Mon Paradis with a lighter heart, and once again the peace and beauty of the white villa beside the sea came upon him like a benediction. The monotony of the life could not weary him, and its solitude seemed only an added charm. Of his father and mother he saw little, except at meals. And then they wore always the air of sorrowful abstraction which, in London and among their fellow kind, gave them so much the appearance of ghosts returned to a world with which they have no sympathy. Yet here, at Mon Paradis, this abstraction seemed inexplicable, as it did not seem in London, for the Franchevilles were obviously not made for the little things of life, the ordinary intercourse of ordinary human beings. Guy had instinctively felt that long ago; he felt it now more keenly than ever. It would have been impossible for the most hardened *mondaine* to talk the usual commonplace gossip of the world to Lady Francheville—as impossible almost as it would have been to gossip with the Sphinx. She was a woman so obviously set apart for something so different—probably higher, it might be, and certainly sadder—that it would have seemed a sort of impertinence. Guy had always felt that, even



in moments when he might have wished his mother to be a little more human and less remote. And Lord Francheville was also a person for whom frivolities had no charm, whom one could not imagine taking an active interest in the things about him. He too walked the earth as a stranger, enveloped in an atmosphere of abstraction. His eyes seemed turned perpetually upon some inward vision which absorbed all his attention.

Yet the abstraction of these two people did not at first affect Guy at all unpleasantly, partly because he was used to it, and partly because he was recovering from a severe shock, and asked nothing better than to be let alone. He was grateful that they respected his own reserve, and demanded no explanation as to his broken engagement; he was grateful to them for leaving him to amuse himself, or not amuse himself, exactly as he chose. He went for long walks into the wild country of pines and olives and cork-trees; he lounged on the quay at Saint-Maure, and talked to the fishers as they mended their torn nets and the brown sails of their boats on the low stone wall which ran past the church, and the cafe, and such other public buildings as Saint-Maure possessed.



They were shy and silent with him at first, until they found he could sail their boats as well as they could sail them, and then they took him to their hearts at once. He sailed with them up and down all that lovely coast, from Saint-Maure right up to Ventimiglia. He was absurdly contented, and almost callously light-hearted, for a man who had just passed through such a painful experience. For the beauty that he loved as he loved nothing else was all about him. The blue sea claimed him, the blue skies smiled at him. The fascination which he felt was irresistible to a temperament like his, for the magic of that coast, of the red rocks and pines and the intensely blue water, is like no other magic in the world. And its curious power springs partly from the fact that, in spite of sunshine and soft airs and dazzling skies, it is a magic of sadness, and not of gaiety—a sadness deep and measureless and mysterious as the sea itself. For the Mediterranean has a soul, and it is not the soul of northern seas—of grey, tumbling waters which break angrily upon an iron shore, frankly terrible, the open enemy of man and all his works. The Mediterranean is more subtle than that, but her terror is not less because she veils it with a

smile. Under the blue waters lurks a spirit no less stern and implacable than that which shows frankly in the grey; under the smile is a terror which may be felt. It hangs strangely about the pine-covered coast-line, desolate in its loveliness, luxuriant in its desolation. People speak of the gaiety of the South, but they are those who do not know the South as it really is, who are content to walk on the Promenade des Anglais, and criticise the dresses and morals of their friends. They do not know the South—it has never revealed itself to them in all its infinite sadness and loneliness—a sadness born of the sea, a loneliness born of the sun, and a sense of mystery, of something lurking behind the mask of all this beauty, something cold, and inhuman, and cruel. No—the people who chatter of southern gaiety are those who have never seen the South. Those who know it as it is never call it gay.

And this beauty, this mystery of the Mediterranean, mastered Guy completely. He no longer wondered that his father and mother spent their lives in voluntary exile. The only thing that puzzled him was, that in the midst of all this beauty, they remained sad and abstracted, that it seemed to have no attraction for them,

in spite of the fact that they were apparently unable to tear themselves away from it. He put his astonishment into words one day, and Lord Francheville looked up at him with the same quick, arrested expression which he had noticed on the night of his arrival. He seemed about to say something, and then checked himself, and was silent. When he spoke, Guy was sure that he said what he had not in the first place intended to say.

“Beauty is not everything. We had a reason for living here.”

Guy supposed that the reason was his mother's health, of which he had always heard so much. He said nothing; and then Lord Francheville made a remark which startled him.

“You admire this,” he said, looking round him with a long, intent gaze, as of a person waking from sleep. “You admire it. But sometimes I look round me, and I hate the beauty I see—yes, I hate it!”

For a moment Guy did not speak. He was astonished, and almost annoyed. He thought of the French groom, of Spence, of the look in his mother's eyes when he had spoken to her of the beauty of Mon Paradis. Something stronger and more unpleasant than astonishment or

annoyance touched him as he stood there on the sunlit terrace, with the palms and roses all about him, and the blue sea smiling below. He felt a chill in the warm air—he did not know why.

“You hate it?” he said at last. “But why should you hate it? Why should you hate all this beauty?”

Lord Francheville’s eyes were still fixed obviously upon what was before him, and not upon that inner vision upon which he generally seemed so intent. And Guy knew that he did indeed hate what he saw—that his speech had been no mere morbid exaggeration of a momentary fancy, but the absolute truth.

“Yes, I hate it,” he said again. “It is a mockery, all of it. This place is a horrible mockery, for every stone in its walls is a lie. Its name is a lie—I tell you, it is a palace of irony!” He seemed to speak more to himself than to Guy, and there was a strange force and sincerity in his tone. “It is a place built to be the home of a great happiness, and it is the home of misery—of despair!”

Again the chill struck coldly upon Guy. He remembered that Lord Francheville had built the villa before his marriage, and presented it to his wife as a wedding gift. And now he said

that it had been the home of misery and despair, instead of happiness. What did he mean?

“I suppose we are none of us ever as happy as we hope to be,” he said presently. “Perhaps you mean that. We build houses of hope, and are left with them on our hands when the hope that built them is dead. And we go on living in them because we have no heart to build others.”

He was thinking of Grace, and he spoke sadly and rather bitterly. For he too had built a house of hope, and had seen his hope fail him.

Lord Francheville turned and looked at him, with a new sort of attention, as though he saw him for the first time.

“Ah, you have found that out too?” he said.

It struck Guy that there was no sympathy in his tone, no regret in his look, but rather a kind of melancholy pleasure—the pleasure a man might feel who finds a companion wandering in the desert in which he himself is lost. It was as though he realised for the first time that Guy was of the same flesh and blood as he was, that he was subject to the same sadness which he himself experienced, in a lesser degree.

“Yes—I have found it out. I suppose every-



one who lives long enough finds it out. But I should have thought you had had everything to make you happy."

Lord Francheville started. Something like horror came into his eyes as he stood looking at his son.

"Happy!" he said, with an indescribable accent of amazement in his thin, worn voice. "Happy—I!"

It was as though the very thought of happiness in connection with himself struck him as so extraordinary that the idea was an outrage upon probability and common sense.

Guy began to be conscious of a feeling of irritation, of revolt. This air of tragedy oppressed him. He could not understand it. He could not imagine what reason his father could have for this extraordinary attitude towards life.

"I don't want to ask questions that you might not care to answer," he said, "but I confess I don't know what you mean. From my point of view you have had everything which usually makes for happiness. It is possible that the things which usually make for happiness don't always make one happy, of course—I can quite see that. But I think you are inclined to be a little morbid. You live too



much to yourselves here, you and my mother. Why don't you ask people here, and try to unbend a little, to be ordinary, and commonplace, and like the rest of the world? The Torrisdales are at Nice, and the Wentworths—I have heard they were great friends of yours before you shut yourselves up here. Why don't you ask them over here? And my grandfather is at Monte Carlo—he is lively enough to amuse anyone. Why don't you get him here for a few days? It would cheer you up."

He had hardly finished speaking before he felt that he had just cast a bomb at his father's feet. Lord Francheville remained gazing at him for a few seconds with a vaguely pained and astonished air.

"Amused! You think I could be *amused*?" he said at last. "You think your grandfather's society could cheer me up?"

Guy did not answer. On second thoughts he did not think so. It began to be painfully obvious to him that his father was not likely to care for any ordinary methods of amusement.

Lord Francheville continued to survey him with an expression of almost pitying surprise for a moment longer. Then he turned away, and went slowly towards the house.

“Poor boy, how little you know!” Guy heard him say.

His son did not follow him. He stood on the terrace, and looked at the blue sea and the pine-fringed shore. The sun did not seem to be quite so warm, or the sea so blue; a shadow had fallen upon the roses and the palms. He looked up at the fantastic domes and spires of Mon Paradis, and shivered involuntarily. For the first time, its beauty left him cold. He remembered what his father had called it—a place built to be the home of a great happiness.

He wondered what had destroyed this happiness which had been so great that it had built a Paradise for itself, and then changed in a moment to despair.

## VIII

FOR the first time since he had left England Guy felt that he was in a strange land, and among people removed from him by their knowledge of a secret, a mystery, of the nature of which he was ignorant. For the first time he wished for someone to whom he could have confided these vague hints, these suggestions which met him on every side, and which began to oppress him. He divined a secret hidden by the white minarets of Mon Paradis, but he did not wish to know what it was, since it had already plunged two lives in despair. His one desire was to escape any further knowledge of this mystery which lay like a shadow upon the loveliness of the villa. That evening after dinner he told his father that he must return to England in a day or two. It was plain that the declaration disconcerted Lord Francheville.

“But you have only been here a few days,” he said uneasily. “I have not told you why I sent for you.”

He seemed distressed and disturbed—far

more so, Guy thought, than the occasion at all warranted.

“You can tell me why you sent for me to-night, then,” he answered, “and to-morrow I can go.”

Lord Francheville drew back with an alarmed gesture.

“No—not to-night. I cannot tell you to-night.”

Guy looked at him. His pale face wore a deeper pallor than usual.

“I am not well to-day,” he added, meeting his son’s eyes.

Nothing more was said that night, for Guy was in no hurry to bring an explanation about. He felt instinctively that it had to do with the secret of his father’s and mother’s unhappiness, and he shrank from hearing it as much as Lord Francheville appeared to shrink from telling it. They walked upon the terrace for half-an-hour in the growing dusk, in a silence which neither cared to break. Presently, in the intense stillness, they heard a bell ring in the villa.

Lord Francheville shot a curious glance at Guy.

“It is the curé—Father Blanc,” he said, in the tone of one who invites a question.

But Guy had grown chary of questions.

“You will have to go and receive him.”

“No. He does not come to see me.”

Guy did not ask which member of the household of Mon Paradis habitually received evening visits from Father Blanc. He felt suddenly that he did not want to know, and that his father intended to tell him.

“He comes to see your mother.”

“Oh.”

Guy's tone did not invite further information. Lord Francheville hesitated for a moment.

“You knew that your mother had become a Catholic?”

“No—I did not know.”

Again his tone repelled rather than invited further information. Yet he was not really so indifferent to Lord Francheville's statement as he appeared to be, for he felt that his mother's change of faith had some connection that he could not understand with this mystery from the very thought of which he shrank. He remembered the small, solitary tinkle of the church bell which had seemed to cry unheard to the dead sunset as he drove from Saint-Maure to Mon Paradis. It had not been unheard, after all. It had drawn one human

heart to the yellow, towerless, ugly little building, in search, perhaps, of the happiness it had lost, or of the peace which it could not find.

“You do not say anything,” Lord Francheville remarked at last.

“Why should I say anything? My mother’s religion is no affair of mine,” Guy said, rather coldly. “One must settle matters of that kind for oneself.”

They walked to the end of the terrace once more, and then Guy stood still, facing the dark sea.

“And you,” he said, “have you also become a Catholic, like my mother?”

Lord Francheville laughed. Guy, who had never heard him laugh before, started in the darkness. The irony of that laugh was so terrible that it hurt.

“No. I do not believe in miracles,” Lord Francheville said.

Was it because his mother hoped for a miracle that she had become a Catholic? Guy wondered. And what was the miracle she desired? He did not ask. After a moment his father spoke again.

“I do not believe in anything,” he said, as though to himself. “How can I?”



Guy was startled, in spite of his desire to preserve a neutral attitude in the conversation, and to invite no confidences.

“I suppose you don’t quite mean that,” he said. “I have heard that everyone believes in something, really. You may not agree with any definite form of religion—that is all.”

“I believe in nothing.”

Guy took the cigarette he was smoking from his lips and threw it into the sea. The silence was so intense that he could hear the little hiss it made as it touched the water and went out.

“That must be rather dreadful,” he said in a low voice. He was beginning to think that quite a number of things in this earthly Paradise must be rather dreadful, too.

“Why? It is less dreadful to believe in nothing at all than to believe in a God who could look on the happiness of the human beings he had created, and then snatch it away, and torture them,” Lord Francheville said slowly. “To believe in a Power which tortures the beings it has created—to pray to it—to worship it.” There was a strange sound in his voice—a sound which suggested hatred of this Power in which he expressed his disbelief,

“That would be dreadful, I admit—the most dreadful thing one could possibly imagine.”

“I am going in. Good-night!” Guy said abruptly.

He felt that he could not stand there a moment longer. The sense of mystery hung over him, enveloped him, like a cloud. It seemed to choke him. He knew that if he listened to much more he should ask the question he did not mean to ask.

He went into the drawing-room on his way to bed. His mother sat by the open window, through which the moonlight was beginning to fall. Father Blanc sat opposite her. They had been talking, but they were silent before Guy’s foot touched the threshold.

“This is my son.”

Guy noticed that the priest looked at him intently. He was a man with a grave face and a pleasant manner. Guy felt that a child or an animal would have gone to him instinctively, and that anyone in trouble would be likely to go to him too, if for nothing higher than a blind faith in his powers of protection and consolation.

They spoke for a few moments on general subjects, and then Guy left them. He knew

that he was not wanted. As he went upstairs he heard the low murmur of voices in the drawing-room. He guessed that the interrupted conversation had been renewed, and that they were discussing the subject which they had abandoned when he appeared.

Next morning he went out early, before his father and mother were visible. He found his way into Saint-Maure, by the palm-fringed road which had seemed to him so strangely beautiful on the night of his arrival. Under the brilliant sunshine the palms looked more than ever like Eastern kings in exile. Their broad leaves drooped sadly. It was a relief to be past them, to meet the native pines and olives.

The quay of Saint-Maure was deserted for once. The fishing-boats were all out, the menders of nets were gone. Even the children who seemed to play eternally in the shade of the trees were nowhere to be seen. Guy stood for a while looking at the blue water, at the roofs of Saint-Tropez across the gulf. Then he turned and went slowly towards the church.

He had not meant to visit it that morning, but he could not resist a sudden impulse to enter it. He thought of his father's remark of the night before as he looked at the ugly, sun-baked little

place. Who could connect a miracle with its yellow walls, from which the plaster had peeled in great flakes, its squat roof, and the naive construction on top which resembled a rusty bird-cage, and contained the melancholy little bell?

The door swung to behind him with a dull sound which echoed through the empty building. At first he could hardly see anything, after the brilliant sunshine of the quay. It was all dark, and close; an odour of stale incense and damp stones hung stiflingly in the still air. The candles on the altar burned with a small, steady light in the gloom. By their light, Guy began to see.

The church was very old. Age was written on the uneven stones of the pavement, on the darkness of the walls. The incense which hung in the air was the incense of centuries, which no rude breath from the outer world had been able wholly to expel. The pillars were bent and crumpled, as though with the effort of supporting their burden for so long. The entire building seemed to have warped and become uneven with age, like an old man who has grown crooked and lame. And it was a decrepitude without dignity, a decay which no

one had endeavoured to arrest or disguise. It was so frank, so simple that its humility was impressive and touching.

Guy stood still, looking round him. Something in the solitude and silence of this little old church affected him strangely. He had stood unmoved in a cathedral, but this darkness, this humble old age, touched him, and almost awed him. Above his head in the gloom swung the model of a full-rigged ship, a thank-offering for the return of some vessel for which anxious prayers had been offered before the altar twinkling with yellow lights; and above a side altar not far away he saw more than one waxen heart suspended, mute, half-ludicrous, half-pathetic memorials of the sorrows of other hearts, not waxen, but of flesh and blood, which had hoped or despaired in this quiet little church of Saint-Maure, and had left these simple souvenirs of their prayers, which had been answered or rejected so long ago that the very names of those who had offered them were perhaps forgotten.

The hanging ship, the waxen hearts, reminded Guy of that moment on the terrace when Lord Francheville had said, with that terrifying laughter which had shocked him so much, that



he did not believe in miracles. The remark had hinted that Lady Francheville not only believed in them, but that she herself sought nothing less than a miracle, here, in the little church of Saint-Maure. Guy wondered what it was. The idea no longer seemed to him extraordinary, as it would have seemed before he left the sunlit quay, ten minutes before. He thought that if he had occasion to pray that a miracle should be performed for him, he would have done so nowhere more willingly than here, for nowhere would the atmosphere of any place have inspired him with so much faith in the realisation of his prayer. He understood suddenly why the voice of the lonely little bell, which had seemed to him so weak, so pathetic, so unheeded, had yet been strong enough to draw Lady Francheville away from the faith in which she had been brought up, to call her with an irresistible appeal to the yellow, ugly little building on the quay. For here were visible memorials of the miracle which she desired—the miracle of an answered prayer. To one desperately in need of a miracle, of something superhuman, of help which man could not give, the very simplicity and poverty of the place would be an attraction, since they



showed so plainly the supreme contrast between the greatness of the thing desired, and the humility of the spot in which it might be granted. He felt that he had known very little when he had thought that there could be no connection between a miracle and this little church. To Lady Francheville, in her mysterious despair, the very walls must be eloquent with the promise of the aid she sought. The hanging ship would speak of it, since it was the memorial of another ship, brought back unscathed from the terrors of the seas; the waxen hearts would be, to her, symbols of other hearts which the world had broken, healed by a power greater than that of the world. She would not see the decrepitude, the marks of age and decay which were everywhere around her, for to her the worn stones would speak of consolation, the crumbling pillars of hope.

Guy did not know how long he stood there. When at last he roused himself from the dream into which he had fallen and went out, he felt nearer to Lady Francheville than he had ever felt before. He no longer thought of her icy manner, of the glacial atmosphere which always surrounded her, for he understood that

beneath the ice was hidden a nature pathetically human, a heart which some terrible disaster had crushed and broken, but which even in its worst despair was brave enough, or foolish enough, to refuse to abandon hope. And he felt as though, in this unreal yet threatening cloud of mystery which hung over Mon Paradis, Lady Francheville's hope was the one thing which was real—more real, more potent in its apparent futility, than her husband's scepticism and despair.

He wondered which would conquer in the end—the hope of the woman who believed in miracles, or the despair of the man who believed in nothing at all.

## IX

GUY emerged from the gloom of the church into the gaiety of the sunlight, and saw that the quay was no longer deserted. An old man had crept out into the warmth and sunshine, and sat crouching on the low stone wall; and beside him stood Father Blanc.

Guy hesitated for a moment. He did not feel pleased at the thought of being seen coming out of the church—he could not have told why, but perhaps because he was conscious that he had been unusually impressed; above all, he did not want Father Blanc to be the person to see him. The priest's back was towards him, and he indulged in a passing hope that he might escape unnoticed. Then the old man looked up, and saw him over Father Blanc's shoulder, and broke off in the middle of a rambling and apparently excited speech with a nod which plainly directed the priest's attention to the new-comer.

“It is he, my father,” Guy heard him say. “It is he—the young one.”

Father Blanc turned quickly. There was nothing for it but to wish him good-morning with as good a grace as possible, and this Guy did. He came up to the low wall, and looked at the sea, and remarked upon the fineness of the day, and it struck him that Father Blanc was disconcerted by his appearance, and that he had wished to see him at that moment as little as he himself had wished to be seen.

“You have been looking at our church, monsieur,” Father Blanc said. “I am sorry I did not know you intended to come. I would have given myself the pleasure of showing you over it.”

“But I don’t care about being shown over places,” Guy answered, smiling. “I enjoyed my solitary visit very much. Your little church is beautiful.”

Father Blanc looked at him gravely.

“Beautiful? But visitors do not usually call it that,” he said, rather sadly.

“Oh, it is not beautiful in one way—I suppose it is really rather ugly. But in another way it is very beautiful indeed.”

Father Blanc smiled. Guy wondered whether the lack of admiration of other visitors had hurt him.

“I see what you mean. The body of the church is ugly, but its soul is beautiful—is it not so?”

“Yes.”

“Just as the body of a human being may be ugly, or even deformed, and his soul beautiful,” Father Blanc said slowly. “Yes—I understand. You are right. Our little church has that beauty. I am glad you saw it. Very few see it, especially amongst your countrymen and countrywomen, monsieur. They use one word when they go in—I do not know what it means, but I do not think it means that they like it, or see that its soul is beautiful, though its body is old and worn-out. They call it ‘stuff-y’!”

Guy laughed.

“That is because of the damp, and the incense.”

Father Blanc shrugged his shoulders dramatically.

“*Tiens!* In England, then, one calls incense ‘stuff-y’? But I begin to understand, monsieur, what your venerable grandparent, Lord Newtown, meant when he said to me on one occasion, ‘My good sir, in England we cultivate our bodies until we have no souls left.’”

“That was exactly what my grandfather would say. You know him?”

“He is a friend of some friends of mine who come every year to Nice. I met him at their house. He was most charming, and *spirituel*. He did not seem to me the least English.”

“You should have told him so—it would have pleased him immensely. He doesn’t like being thought English at all.”

“He is not English, in the very least. But I am uncivil, monsieur—I make a wrong impression on you. You must not think that I dislike the English. They have solid qualities—very solid—which I admire. Only their conversation—it is not admirable, I confess. The men do not say anything at all, and the women ask questions—but yes! what an infinity of questions! And they do not by any chance wait for an answer to their questions—no, they ask all the time, and do not seem to wish for a reply.”

“You must not think we are all as bad as that!”

“On the contrary, I do not. There are the English who are English, and those who are like Lord Newtown, or yourself, or——”

He broke off. Guy suspected that he had been about to say “your mother,” but the sentence remained unfinished.



“The people who ask so many questions don’t see much. They would only understand that your little church was stuffy. They would not understand that it was beautiful, or why it was so. That sort of thing is beyond them. In England I have met lots of people who have been here, in Saint-Maure, but they could never tell me anything about it. They did not even seem to know that it was beautiful. All they knew was, whether the chicken was properly cooked at dinner, or if a respectable English duchess had or had not been staying recently at their particular hotel.”

Father Blanc stared for a moment, and then began to laugh.

“You resemble Lord Newtown, monsieur. It is as though I heard him speak.”

“Oh, he is much more amusing than I could be. He is the only member of our family who is amusing, who doesn’t seem weighed down by a mysterious burden.” He stopped, realising that he had said too much.

Father Blanc was no longer laughing. The amusement had died out of his kind, sensible face. It was troubled, and he looked at Guy with an expression of pity and embarrassment.

“There is always trouble in the world, monsieur,” he said.

Guy felt suddenly that he knew, that he understood the mystery which hung over Mon Paradis. He had thought so when he left him with Lady Francheville the night before; now he was sure of it.

“Yes, I know there is always trouble,” he said, almost impatiently. “I have just been in great trouble myself. But not this sort of trouble.”

Father Blanc was silent. He offered no denial of what Guy said. It was, perhaps, because he could offer none. Also, he probably felt that it was not his business to explain what Lord and Lady Francheville had apparently thought fit to leave unexplained.

They had walked side by side a little way along the quay, away from the old man huddled against the low wall. Guy stood still, and looked at the priest with a sort of hesitation.

“I don’t know why I said this to you. It is not your business to hear it, I know. But last night my father told me that my mother had joined your Church, and that—that she wished for a miracle. And that was why I came here this morning. It sounds rather odd, and perhaps you will think it impertinent, but I

wanted to know how anybody could possibly expect a miracle in that little, yellow, tumble-down place.”

He spoke rapidly, acting on the impulse of a moment. He was aware that what he said must, as he had just admitted, sound odd and perhaps impertinent to Father Blanc. But if so he showed no sign of resentment. There was a very gentle look in his eyes.

“And now—do you understand better, now you have seen it?”

“Yes, I think I do. That was why I said your little church was beautiful—it helped me to understand. I have never come across just that sort of beauty before.”

Father Blanc did not speak for a moment. Guy could see that what he said had both pleased and touched him. He looked less embarrassed, less pitying.

“I am very glad, monsieur,” he said at last. “Glad that our little church helped you to understand what you wished to understand, and glad, also, of the wish that brought you to it. For it was built to help those who could not help themselves—or, as Lord Francheville put it to you, to perform miracles. If it has helped you to understand, may it not also help madame

your mother to obtain that miracle for which she hopes?"

Guy looked up at him swiftly. In his voice he detected a tone which he had not expected to detect there, at any rate; and he spoke almost before he had realised what he meant to say.

"You do not believe that she will obtain it," he said. "You do not believe it any more than my father does."

It was, oddly enough, a shock to him. He had expected Father Blanc to believe that a miracle might happen in his little church, whatever anyone else might do. And now he was quite sure that he did not believe it, and that he was too honest to pretend that he did. The thought came to him that this trouble which was hidden from him must be very terrible, if there was no help for it, either in earth or heaven.

He read a reflection of the thought in Father Blanc's face.

"No," he said, very sadly, "I am afraid I do not believe it, monsieur. It is want of faith on my part, no doubt, but I am afraid I cannot believe it. To me, it seems that only in one way could the miracle come to pass, and that

way would not be miraculous at all. And—I cannot say more to you—it is not, I am sure, for that way that madame your mother hopes.”

The strange little interview came to an end, and Guy walked back slowly to Mon Paradis. He hardly saw the blue sea below him, or noticed the fragrance of the pines. He was thinking of Father Blanc’s last words. By a miracle by natural means he had meant, he felt sure, the death of someone. Guy could not have told by what process of mental reasoning he had come to this conclusion, but he was quite certain that it was correct.

Only in one way could the miracle for which Lady Francheville prayed come to pass. So Father Blanc had said, and he trusted Father Blanc implicitly.

But who was to die, in order that a miracle should be performed?

THAT day, for the first time since Guy had come to Mon Paradis, Lady Francheville mentioned Grace, and the engagement which had come to such a strange termination. She was alone with Guy on the terrace when the subject came up, and he was glad of it, for he shrank from the idea of an explanation with his father.

“You gave Grace up because of the accident,” Lady Francheville said, quite calmly and rather suddenly in a pause in a conversation which had had nothing whatever to do with Grace.

Guy was silent for a moment.

“It sounds dreadful, put like that,” he said at last. “I don’t know what you must think of me.”

“It does not matter what I think of you,” Lady Francheville answered slowly. “The point is, what Grace must think of you. If I were Grace, I think I should hate you.”

She spoke with a deliberation which contrasted curiously with her words. Guy felt that she



was in earnest, that she meant exactly what she said.

“You don’t understand. It was not because of the accident. It was——”

“It was because Grace had become lame through your fault, and you did not care for her lame—so you gave her up. I think I quite understand,” Lady Francheville returned, with cutting distinctness.

“You—you have heard from England?” Guy said.

“I have heard from Georgiana, and also from Julian. Grace has been very ill. They thought once that she would die. Perhaps it would have been better for her if she had died.”

Guy sat for some time without speaking. The agony which he had endured on the night after the specialist’s visit came back again, and kept him dumb. Lady Francheville sat motionless and unmoved in her long chair, looking at the sea with a cold and melancholy gaze.

“I know I behaved vilely,” Guy said presently. “But afterwards I went back—I entreated her to see me, and she refused. I did not give her up—it was she who gave me up.”

“Did you expect her to see you when you went back?”

“Yes. There are women who forgive—who would forgive worse things than that,” Guy said bitterly.

“Are there? I never met a woman who would forgive your behaviour to Grace. I hope you do not expect her to forgive you.”

“You are very hard,” Guy said, looking up at her. “I have always wondered what made you so hard. You have never cared for me, and now you can’t make allowances for me. I thought women always made allowances for their children. But you don’t.”

Lady Francheville moved a little uneasily in her long chair. Her eyes, fixed upon the sea, looked less melancholy, less cold.

“I beg your pardon,” she said presently, with a curious humility. “Perhaps I am hard—I don’t know. Perhaps I should not have said what I did. There may be women who would forgive you, though Grace cannot—though I cannot.”

She rose from her chair and stood an instant, hesitating.

“I hope there may be, Guy,” she said, more gently than he had ever heard her speak to him.

Then she went away towards the villa. It seemed to Guy that the rigid grace of her carri-

age was altered, that she had softened in some unaccountable way when he had accused her of being hard, and of not making allowances for him. He wondered why so simple a remark had apparently made such an impression on her. It was strange, for she had never seemed to him at all impressionable. He had called her hard, in a moment of exasperation, just as for years he had thought her hard—just as other people, he knew, called her unsympathetic. Now he thought of the little church at Saint-Maure, and reproached himself. Her hardness was a mask, her coldness a pretence. He felt that his accusation had hurt her, and he had not meant to hurt her, but merely to defend himself.

But nothing more was said of the engagement or Grace. He noticed at dinner that his mother and father were unusually silent. Lord Francheville, indeed, seemed plunged in abstraction so profound that he knew nothing of what was passing around him. After dinner he walked on the terrace in silence. He did not hear the few remarks which Guy made. The bell rang, and Guy knew that Father Blanc had come to see his mother, but Lord Francheville made no sign that he had heard a sound. He walked up and down in the darkness in a silence which

began to affect Guy's nerves unpleasantly. It seemed to him that it was a silence which was ominous with meaning.

He heard the sound of someone departing, and knew that it was Father Blanc. A clock in the villa struck ten, and he breathed a sigh of relief.

"I have some letters to write," he said, trying to speak carelessly, to seem at his ease. "If you don't mind, I think I'll turn in."

Lord Francheville started at the sound of his voice. Then he put his hand suddenly on Guy's arm.

"Don't go. I have something to say to you."

His voice was the voice of a man in whom some terrible struggle is raging; the pressure of his thin fingers on his son's arm was almost painful.

"You—you want to tell me something?"

He felt that Lord Francheville was shivering as though with cold.

"Yes—but not yet. You must wait. I can't speak while people are about. You must wait. Don't go."

"I am not going. But had you better tell me, if it affects you like this? Will you not tell me some other time?"

Lord Francheville took his hand from Guy's arm. When he spoke again, it was with a calm which was desperate, and tragic.

"No—there will be no other time. If I do not tell you now, I shall never tell you."

Then he resumed his walk up and down the terrace. Guy walked by his side. This slow promenade of waiting seemed to him unspeakably uncanny. The darkness of the southern night hung over them like a threat, the vague murmur of the sea against the wall of Mon Paradis sounded like voices whispering, the voices of people telling each other a story he could not hear. And he knew that it was the story his father meant to tell him, and that he wished to avoid hearing it as he wished for nothing else in the world.

He did not know how long they walked up and down, waiting. At Mon Paradis, everyone went to bed early. They heard the sound of windows being closed, or shuttered. Presently a small figure stole out of the shadows and approached them.

It was Spence. Lord Francheville saw him, and paused in his tireless promenade.

"You may shut up, Spence. We shall come in presently. Don't wait up—we may be late."

It seemed to Guy that Spence's small, mouse-coloured head was bent lower to-night, that there was an anxious tone in his voice as he thanked Lord Francheville, and bade them good-night. Why was he anxious? Was he in the secret—did he know the story that was to be told?

Once more they were alone. The villa grew dark and silent. Guy thought of the night of his arrival, when the solitude, the mystery of Mon Paradis had seemed to him so beautiful. It did not seem beautiful now. The enchantment was gone. The palms no longer reminded him of the Eastern kings. The pearl-like domes and cupolas hanging above them in the dusk no longer resembled a palace from the Arabian Nights. Or if they did, it was a palace in which some strange and dreadful secret was shut up—some strange and dreadful secret which at any moment might burst forth from its prison, and spring upon them, like a thing malignant and alive.

They had reached the end of the terrace farthest from the villa. Some chairs always stood there, for it was a favourite spot with Lady Francheville, and she often sat there for hours together, doing nothing, staring idly at the



sea. And here Lord Francheville stopped, and sank heavily into a chair.

“Sit down.”

Guy obeyed. It was coming, then, this undesired and dreaded revelation. As he sat down, he faced the villa. Every window was dark. Except one—for in the window which he had noticed on the night he arrived a faint light burned still.

It was the window in the tower—the window which was barred.

LORD FRANCHEVILLE did not speak at once. It was dark at this end of the terrace, and there was no moon. In this darkness, his figure was only an indistinct blur of shadow upon a deeper gloom. Guy would have given a good deal for a light; but the only light visible was that which shone faintly in that barred window of Mon Paradis.

Though he could not see him, Guy realised that his father was looking at that window, and at the light which burned behind the bars. Presently Lord Francheville spoke.

“I don’t know how to begin—I don’t know how to tell you.”

His voice was helpless, distressed, querulous. Once more it seemed to Guy that he was struggling with a burden too heavy for him to bear.

He said nothing. Presently, out of the darkness, the worn, helpless voice came again:

“I must tell you—but I don’t know how to begin.”

There was something indescribably pathetic in this reiteration. It seemed to Guy that the burden which he had borne so long had crushed Lord Francheville at last. But he was wrong. There was a moment of silence, of hesitation; and then the voice came again, less helpless, stronger—the voice of a man who means to do what he has set himself to do.

“Guy, I have kept something from you all your life, and to-night I think I have been wrong, I think it would have been better if you had always known what I am going to tell you now. I wanted you to be happy, I wanted you to be kept as long as possible from the thing that has spoilt my own happiness. And now I know that it was a mistake, for I have heard how you ran away from Grace the other day, when she was most in need of you, and I knew that, if you had known this, you would not have done it. For you cannot run away from this, you cannot escape from it. I would have given everything in the world to have been able to run away from it, but I could not—I could not! I have been tied to it always, for nearly forty years—for half my life. I have kept half your life free from it—I have given you all the happiness I could. Your mother says that happiness

isn't everything, but I can't believe that, for it was everything to me, while it lasted. Only—it did not last; it came to an end. And this came with the end—this——”

He paused for a moment. There was the sound of a thing tortured in his voice as it came out of the darkness.

“It came to an end. The happiness died, and *this* was left. I built Mon Paradis for happiness—I called it Paradise—and for a little while it was Paradise. And then this thing came.”

There was revolt in his voice now, as well as pain. He seemed to appeal against this nameless tragedy which had spoiled his life—to appeal without hope, but with a savage sense of the injustice of his fate.

“Why should it have come? What had I done that a curse should fall upon me? I have always asked that, but there is only one answer. If it is a crime to be too happy, that was the only crime I had committed. I had built a house of hope, as you said the other day, and it was changed to despair. I had built a Paradise, and it was changed to Hell.”

Guy, in the darkness, heard and understood. He remembered the night of Mrs Kent's second

dance; and suddenly he felt an immense pity for this man who had suffered for forty years as he had suffered for a few days.

“I understand,” he said. “Perhaps that was it. One should not be too happy—it brings ill-fortune. One should not call one’s house Paradise. It is like a defiance to Fate—and Fate does not like being defied.”

“No,” Lord Francheville repeated, with intense bitterness, “you are right—Fate does not like being defied. Just when my happiness had reached its height, Fate hurled my defiance back upon me.”

Guy was silent. Below, against the wall, the whisper of the sea rose and died away. And then Lord Francheville spoke, in a hard, harsh voice—a voice that tried to be brave, but only succeeded in being desperate.

“Guy, you are not my only son.”

For a moment, Guy was too much amazed to say anything.

“Not—— But what do you mean?”

“You are not my only son. You have been brought up to think that you are, but you are not. Your mother and I had another child, born years and years before you, in the year after our marriage—born here, in this place

which we had dared to name Paradise—which had been a Paradise to us until then.”

“But I know that. It died, that child—or it was born dead, I don’t remember which, now. I have heard about it, and what a trouble it was to you, and how for years you thought you would have no children and how wild my grandfather was—I remember all that quite well.”

He spoke lightly, almost cheerfully. In his heart he was saying: It is not all. There is something much worse to come.

“It died, didn’t it?”

“No. It didn’t die.” There was a measureless sadness in Lord Francheville’s tone. “That—that was the worst of all. It lived—Fate had no mercy upon us. It lived.”

After a moment he spoke again:

“It is alive now.”

Guy was silent. Why was he told this? Why had it been kept secret? Why did the idea of this unknown, unacknowledged being fill him with repugnance? And what was the meaning of this terrible sadness in his father’s voice?

“You need not distress yourself,” he said at last. “Of course, you ought to have told me. Perhaps it isn’t—well, quite fair, to spring it on



me like this. If you have another son, older than I am, I am nobody in particular, and he is everything—I see that. But it does not matter, as it happens. Even if I had married Grace, it wouldn't have mattered—she is not the sort of girl to care about things of that sort—I mean, the title, or the money.”

He stopped, with a touch of embarrassment.

“The title? The money?” Lord Francheville repeated.

“Yes,” Guy said, a little sharply. This extraordinary unworldliness was beginning to irritate him.

“But it has nothing to do with the title, or the money,” Lord Francheville said slowly.

“Pardon me, it has everything on earth to do with it. This—this other son is your heir. He will be Lord Francheville, after you. He will be Earl of Newtown, after my grandfather—and you too, I hope.”

There was a long silence.

“I shall never be Earl of Newtown,” Lord Francheville said presently. “You will succeed your grandfather; and when I die, you will take my title.”

Guy turned, and stared hard at the dim figure in the darkness beside him.

“What do you mean? I shall not take what does not belong to me.”

With a movement of uncontrollable agitation, Lord Francheville rose from his chair.

“You don’t understand. This—this thing—I can’t call it a child—I can’t call it a man—it was dreadful from the moment it drew breath—unspeakably dreadful. It was horrible, always—it will never be anything but horrible. . . . Guy, it is a deformity—the most awful deformity that ever came into the world—it is not human—it is a monster in body, and in mind——”

He broke off, as though unable to continue. “The God who made it—the God who made it to torture two people who were happy until it came,” he said, in a tone of indescribable bitterness and hatred, “perhaps knows what it is in mind—I do not.”

In the darkness his white face shone with an expression so dreadful that Guy made a swift gesture of horror.

“You don’t know what you are saying!”

“I know very well. For forty years I have kept silence, and to-night the silence is broken. To-night I shall speak. Is it nothing that my whole life has been ruined by this thing? Do you know what I have suffered? I was a young

man when it came—younger than you are now—and it killed my youth in me, it killed my happiness, it killed everything that makes life worth living. Have you never asked yourself why I cared so little for you, why I took no interest in you, why I let you grow up far away from me, almost among strangers? You are a son any man might be proud of, but I have never been proud of you, I have never cared for you—I could not. When I looked at you I remembered that other thing, and the misery it had brought me.”

“Don’t talk about it,” Guy said, “I understand.”

And indeed he understood many things which before had been incomprehensible to him. Stunned, bewildered as he was by this extraordinary revelation, he understood. The horror which had come upon him that day in Lady Strange’s room, when he had refused to go to Grace, came upon him now; and he realised that it was a thing outside himself, as it were, and beyond his powers of control. It was the heritage which had come to him from the man whose youth and happiness had been struck down in a single day—the heritage which had sprung from Lord Francheville’s long and

agonised abhorrence of the awful thing which was his elder son.

“Where is it?” Guy said suddenly.

Lord Francheville pointed to the faintly lighted window in the tower.

“There. There is a secret suite of rooms in the roof, hidden among those fantastic domes and cupolas which you think so beautiful. No one knows the door which leads to it except your mother, Spence, and myself. But now you must know, for we are all old, and if anything were to happen to us, you must know how to reach—it.”

Guy turned cold. He did not know how long he sat motionless, looking towards the lighted tower. He remembered what his father had just said—“the most awful deformity which ever came into the world.” He could not speak. Fear and loathing kept him dumb.

“That is why I waited up to-night,” Lord Francheville said. “I want to take you up there now, when no one is about. Servants are always so suspicious, and we have to be very careful—it is only safe to go up at night.”

He made a step forward along the terrace, towards the house. Guy did not move. He stared still, as though fascinated, at the barred

window in the tower. Lord Francheville came back, and touched him on the shoulder.

“Come, Guy.”

He did not obey. The hand tightened on his shoulder.

“Come. Are you going to refuse? It is no use—you had better come. You ran away from Grace, but you can’t run away from this.”

Guy rose, and followed Lord Francheville’s tall figure towards Mon Paradis.

LORD FRANCHEVILLE's speech stung Guy to an effort which, for him, was little less than heroic. He had run away from Grace, and he had suffered bitterly for it ; now he was not going to run away. He thought of what he had meant to make of his life—of the existence which he had planned with Grace, the ideal, beautiful existence of which he had been so sure, in which ugliness of any kind was to be the unseen thing. He thought of it, and in the midst of the sickening loathing which mastered him he was almost amused at the ghastly irony of the fate which had fallen upon him, and from which he could not escape. For the life in which ugliness was to be an unseen thing, he saw one chained, as his father's had been, to a secret terror—to that other, and more dreadful Unseen Thing, which dwelt in the pearl-like towers which crowned the loveliness of Mon Paradis—the Unseen Thing which was of his own blood, which should have stood where he stood in the estimation of his world, which in reality bore



his name, and was heir to the titles and estates which he was to inherit as a usurper.

He hated Mon Paradis. He was dimly conscious of his hatred as he followed Lord Francheville along the terrace. He hated every palm in the grounds, every rose which bloomed in the neatly kept beds. He hated the lying beauty of the white villa, with its suggestion of a palace in the Arabian Nights. He hated the blue sea which lapped against the wall, and whispered mysteriously in the night. For the beauty which surrounded him on every side was a lie, as his father had called it—a mask for the Unseen Thing which lurked behind the lighted window and its bars.

He followed Lord Francheville with a determination entirely foreign to his nature, a resolution which was grim and perhaps savage. Fate had played upon him two of the ugliest tricks which even Fate can devise. He was furious with Fate, with Lord Francheville, with himself. Perhaps he was furious, too, with the Unseen Thing, whose existence had made his own a sort of lie. He was in the mood when a man will do things absolutely repugnant to him at other times.

If the door of the secret room had stood

there, upon the terrace, he would have opened it, without hesitation, and gone boldly in. But the door of the secret room did not open upon the terrace. Lord Francheville provided himself with a little lamp which stood lighted in the hall. Then he began slowly to ascend the shallow steps of the great staircase of Mon Paradis.

The villa was dark and silent. There was something breathless in its silence, there was something ghostly in the appearance of the tall figure of Lord Francheville, lamp in hand, ascending the interminable stairs. His shadow, gaunt and gigantic, stalked beside him on the wall. Guy followed him mechanically. They walked silently in the midst of silence. The light of the lamp moved before them like a supernatural illumination up the dark well of the staircase.

They passed the door of Guy's room, at which he had had his midnight interview with Lady Francheville. Guy understood now what she had been doing in the empty suite of rooms over his in the middle of the night—he understood her embarrassment at being surprised there. He understood the mysterious words of the French groom, and Spence's unspoken

dislike to Mon Paradis. And once more he felt a furious anger against himself, against his own blindness and stupidity. Why had he not guessed that something was wrong? Why had he not left Mon Paradis next day, and escaped what lay before him?

Lord Francheville turned into the uninhabited suite of rooms on the next floor. It had the cold, uncomfortable look which empty rooms always wear at night. Guy noticed that all the rooms were panelled with elaborately carved white panelling, and hung with a pale shade of yellow the sight of which ever afterwards cost him a shudder.

The third room of the suite seemed to be a little library, or study—quite small, and very dainty, with its harmonies of white and yellow, its crowded bookshelves, reaching, on one wall, from floor to ceiling. Guy noticed that the books had all more or less gay and elaborate bindings—pretty, butterfly volumes of poetry or fiction, mostly French, from the titles which caught his eyes. It seemed to him incongruous and rather dreadful that the way to the secret room should lie through this pretty, frivolous place.

Yet here Lord Francheville stopped, before

the gay bookshelves, and put out his hand as though to take a delicate gold and lilac bound volume from its place. Guy watched him, astonished, wondering what he could want with the book.

He took it out, nevertheless, and thrust his hand into the empty space it had left. And the whole side of the wall swung towards them slowly, like an opening door.

Lord Francheville replaced the book, and signed to Guy to precede him through this curiously contrived doorway. He drew the false wall to behind them, and Guy saw that they stood in a small stone hall, from which a staircase wound upwards into the darkness. And once again Lord Francheville took the lead, and climbed the stone steps with Guy at his heels.

It seemed to Guy that there was a sound in the stillness—a sound like the wind rising and falling, with a strange, half-human cry.

They went on and up. At the end of the staircase, a bare wall confronted them. Lord Francheville touched it, and a door opened in it, as though by magic. Again, Guy remembered the Arabian Nights. What must it be, this Unseen Thing which was guarded by such

precaution, which was hidden with such extraordinary care?

They were in another small stone hall, similar to the first, except that in this there was no staircase. The place of the staircase was taken by a door — a door of enormous strength, secured by heavy iron bolts.

Lord Francheville stood still before this door. The light of the lamp in his hand fell full upon it, upon its bars, and clampings, and iron bolts. Its very strength was significant; every nail, every bolt, told of another strength behind it, a strength which wished to break out, to escape from the prison in which it was so closely confined. This door might have guarded the cage of some dangerous wild animal.

And somehow, with the sight of this door, every semblance of humanity was stripped from the idea of that which it hid. It was not a man who dwelt behind those bolts and bars; it was not even a wild beast. Looking at that door, Guy understood Lord Francheville's description as he had not understood it before. The occupant of the secret place of Mon Paradis was a monster in body and in mind, for only a monster—a thing neither beast nor man, and therefore more terrible than either—would have



needed defences such as this to keep him from what should have been his fellow kind.

Lord Francheville stood there, motionless, with the lamp in his hand. His thin face wore an expression of loathing. He seemed to wait, to listen, to expect something.

Suddenly, from beyond the door came a sound—the voice of a creature crying, crying blindly, without sense or soul, but with a caged beast's immense, unappeasable misery, a caged beast's mad fury against the bars which stand between it and its freedom. It was a sound awful beyond words, horrible beyond description, this voice which cried and cried behind the bolted door. For it was a sound outside nature, an outrage alike on the humanity to which it ought to have belonged, and the beast to which it seemed to belong. It was a sound cast out beyond the bounds of classification, a sound which was a monstrosity in itself, this voice of the Unseen Thing.

Guy, hearing it, knew for what Lord Francheville had waited. He did not look at his father—he could not. He knew now why he had always worn that strange air of a man crushed down beneath a burden too great for him to bear; he did not wonder at it any more. This



was the burden which had crushed him—this thing crying in its dreadful, senseless wretchedness, behind the bars of its prison. What human being, knowing himself responsible for the existence of the thing which could utter such a sound, would ever hold up his head again, or feel anything but an outcast upon whom had fallen the most awful curse which the mind of man could imagine?

The sound went on, monotonously dreadful. Its only note of humanity was the never-changing sadness and despair which spoke through all its fury. Was it possible that, in some strange depth of the deformed and tortured soul which dwelt somewhere in its deformed and tortured body, the Unseen Thing was conscious of what manner of creature it was, and that lamentation for its own fate, horror of its own deformity of body and soul, mingled with its frenzied desire to escape from captivity? Guy did not know, but the idea occurred to him as he stood there, in the narrow stone place the walls of which echoed that terrible voice. It almost seemed to him that it might be so, and he could not have told which seemed to him more awful—the thought, or the sound which inspired it.

For a long time Lord Francheville stood

silent before the barred door, listening. Guy wondered whether there was not a sort of triumph in his attitude, a savage, unnatural pleasure in having reached the worst moment which life had now in store for him. He had endured so much, suffered so much; perhaps now he was glad that another should endure and suffer too. Perhaps he was glad that the revelation he had so dreaded had been made, and that the burden he had borne so long was to fall upon younger, stronger shoulders than his own.

At last he moved. Very slowly he began to draw one of the heavy bolts. The sound which he made seemed to rouse the Unseen Thing to greater fury. Guy heard heavy, shuffling movements beyond the door, as of something unwieldy and awkward dragging itself about, hurling itself against the walls in its desire to be free. And a new note crept into the cry which went on unceasingly—a note of eagerness, of expectation, almost of hope.

He did not know why, but that note of expectation and hope made him shudder from head to foot, and turned the blood in his veins to ice. He looked at Lord Francheville. He was undoing the many bolts with an air of determination.

He watched Lord Francheville's fingers with mechanical attention. He could not have moved, he could not have spoken, had it been to save himself from instant destruction. Only one idea dominated his mind. He had run away once—he would not run away again.

It was not fear which he felt. He would have faced the greatest danger coolly enough. The torture which he endured as he stood there waiting for his father to undo the door was so great that he wondered afterwards that his brain stood the strain, but it had nothing to do with fear. He was not afraid of the Unseen Thing, any more than he had been afraid of Kitty Fellowes—what he felt was infinitely worse, and infinitely stronger than fear.

Lord Francheville, with the last bolt half drawn, turned suddenly. For a moment, Guy's white face stared at him unseeingly; then, still silent, he swayed, and fell forward in a dead faint.

## XIII

WHEN Guy came to himself, he was lying on the bed in his own room. Spence was standing beside him, looking down at him with an expression of sorrow and distress.

“Are you feeling better, sir? Oh, Master Guy, was he very bad to-night? I told his lordship—I begged him not to go up, but he was that determined, I couldn’t do anything with him.” The old man’s voice shook. “You’ll excuse the liberty I take, Master Guy, but my heart bleeds for you—it does indeed.”

Guy put out his hand.

“Don’t talk about taking liberties, Spence—we’re all in the same boat, and you’re a good sort. I feel an awful coward beside you, when I think that you go in there every day, and I——” He broke off, with a shudder. “Is it always as bad as that, Spence?”

“No, sir, not always—sometimes he’s just stupid, as you might say—doesn’t take any notice of me, or anything, but just sits and sulks. And sometimes, with her ladyship, he’s

quite quiet and gentle. She's wonderful with him—wonderful. He'll do anything for her."

"What! She goes there often?"

"Every day, sir, and often at night too. There's nothing she wouldn't do for him. There's plenty call her ladyship cold and hard, Master Guy—I've heard them myself—but they wouldn't if they saw her once with him."

Guy lay silent for a moment. He seemed to see Lady Francheville, lamp in hand, ascending those interminable little staircases of stone, entering the secret room, alone and unafraid, in the darkness and silence of the night. He seemed to see her shut in with the Unseen Thing—alone with its dreadfulness, and with her own more dreadful sorrow.

"How can she?" he said, half to himself. "How can she?"

"I ask myself that too sometimes, sir. But—she doesn't see him as we do, and it's the mercy of God that she doesn't. He's always her child to her, Master Guy—I don't think she has ever forgotten that, for one moment, all the time. His lordship hates him; I—well, there's days when I'm afraid of him, and that's the truth: but her ladyship is always the same—he belongs to her, she doesn't know how to

be afraid of him. He's the child she meant to love, and—it seems odd to say so, it seems almost as if it couldn't be, I know—but I think she does love him, even as he is.”

“Love him!” Guy said, in a tone of horror. “Spence, I didn't see him—the sound of him was enough. It would be impossible for any human being to tolerate the creature that could utter sounds like that.”

“You think so, sir, and so do I—and so does his lordship. But women aren't made as we are.”

“She has never cared for me,” Guy said, involuntarily. He was conscious of a sense of loss, of an additional feeling of hatred towards the Unseen Thing, to whom, in its misfortune, something had yet been given which had been denied to him.

Spence hesitated.

“You don't know her ladyship, sir. You'll excuse me saying so, but I've been in the family a long while now, and things have been so that I've been taken out of my place, so to speak—I know her ladyship as you don't know her—as his lordship, I believe, doesn't know her. It's not that she doesn't care for you—it's that she's got no more to give to anyone, as it were.



You've been out in the world, with friends, and cousins, and people to care for you. And you're one anyone would take to. But *him*—he's never had anyone but her that could do more than bear to be in the room with him—and even his lordship can't bear that. Don't you see that—that there was nothing for anyone else, sir? She felt that if she had let herself care for you, there would have been nothing left for him. And he wanted it—you didn't. He had nothing else, and you had so much."

"You are right," Guy said, in a low voice. "I didn't think of that."

"No, sir—I knew you didn't. But I've thought of it many a time, when—when it has been said to me that it was odd her ladyship never seemed to want you here. And for his lordship, I think he's never held up his head since the day *he* was born, and he saw him—the son he meant to be so proud of, the heir to the name he loved. Oh, Master Guy, it's been an awful tragedy—the lives of those two who began with such happiness, who were so gay, and so handsome, and young, with everything in the world that they could want—an awful tragedy! There are times when one doesn't

wonder that his lordship is mad and savage against heaven and earth—when one wonders how such things are let to be, how such misery can be allowed. But when I think like that, I think of her ladyship's goodness and patience; and I think, if she can bear it, it is very little for others to bear it too."

Guy did not speak. Spence's mouselike head was turned wistfully on one side, his eyes were pathetic with the wish to comfort, to console, even to condone this irremediable misfortune which had cursed the family he had served so long and so well.

Guy looked up at last. The dawn was beginning to throw a red light through the shutters.

"I've kept you here for ages," he said with a start. "I'm all right now—go and get some rest, Spence."

"Yes, sir. It don't matter about me—I'm often up at night. You'll try and sleep, Master Guy?"

"I don't feel much like sleep," Guy said bitterly.

It seemed to him as though he would never sleep again without hearing that terrible crying behind the bolted door. Wherever he went,

whatever he did, he thought that sound would pursue him. He heard it as he lay there in the silence, after Spence had gone; he would hear it until the hour he died. He did not wonder any longer at Lord Francheville's despair. He did not wonder at the atmosphere of melancholy abstraction which enveloped these two people whom a dreadful fate had set apart from their kind—at the remote and ghostly air which they wore even in London, when far away from the scene of their lifelong martyrdom. He guessed that that sound was with them there, that the memory of the secret room of Mon Paradis never left them, even for a moment. Other sorrows might be forgotten; from other misfortunes, however heavy, there might be means of escape; but there was no escape from the memory of the Unseen Thing.

Of one way of escape he did not think.

For an hour he lay there, watching the red light broaden behind the shutters. It was full day when Spence tapped at the door, and came in quickly, with a scared and anxious face.

“I hate to trouble you, sir, after all that's happened to-night, but the library door's locked, and—and the lights are burning, just as they were after we brought you down, and his lord-

ship went there to read. I could call François, but I don't like to make a fuss."

Guy sat up on the bed.

"You mean my father is still in the library?"

"He often sits up with his books all night, sir—it's nothing to be alarmed about. Only—I've knocked, and he doesn't answer, and I don't know what to do."

"I'll come at once."

But they knocked and called at the library door in vain. There was no answer, no sound of anything moving. Spence was plainly alarmed.

"What shall we do, sir? I never knew his lordship not answer before. I hope he hasn't had one of his attacks, alone in there."

"He has attacks?" Guy said quickly.

"Yes. What are you going to do, sir?"

Guy flung his whole weight against the door. There was a splintering crash as it gave way, and a cry from Spence—a cry of fear. For the lights were burning in the library: and Lord Francheville sat at his desk, but not as he was wont to sit. He had fallen forward upon the papers he had been reading, like a man tired out, who lays his head upon his arms, and drops

asleep in a moment, unable to resist the weariness which has seized him.

Spence ran to his master's side, but Guy did not move. He stood looking almost with envy at the quiet figure at the desk.

The heavy burden had slipped at last from Lord Francheville's shoulders—he had laid down the load of tragedy which had oppressed him, and escaped for ever from the memory of the Unseen Thing.

Guy could not have told what followed that discovery in the library. He was dimly aware of haste and confusion; and in the midst of this confusion, of Lady Francheville's presence. She alone was calm and composed. Probably the blow had not fallen upon her unexpectedly, for Lord Francheville had long been in bad health. She directed the terror-stricken servants, she stood by, silent and unmoved, and saw her husband's body carried from the library. If she felt grief, she showed none. Guy almost fancied he detected in her manner a sort of relief, as though the tension of her life had relaxed for a moment.

It was she who interviewed the doctor, summoned hastily from Saint-Maure; it was she who wrote and despatched the necessary telegrams. She brushed aside Guy's proffered help. When all was done she sent for him to the library.

He found her sitting at Lord Francheville's desk. In the gloom of the darkened room her



figure, in its white morning dress, had a ghostly, unreal look. As Guy entered she raised her head, and seemed to become conscious, for the first time, of the darkness which had fallen upon Mon Paradis.

“Please pull up the blinds,” she said, in a voice that sounded a little impatient.

Guy hesitated. He wondered what she meant. He even wondered whether the shock of that morning had affected her brain.

“Why do you look at me like that?” she said quietly. “Do you think that what has happened is a cause for grief? He has escaped—it is we who are left in prison, it is we who should be mourned. His life was a tragedy so terrible that his death can add nothing to it. He has escaped—he is free. Do you, knowing what you know, wish him back, to suffer as I must suffer?”

Guy looked at her for a moment in the gloom.

“You are glad that he is dead!” he said at last.

“Yes—I am glad. I loved him better than anything in the world—and I brought into his life the thing that ruined it. He never said that—and I would never say it, even to myself, until he was dead. If I had said it, I think

I should have gone mad. . . . But now it is all over—for him.”

She drew a long breath of relief. There was a strange brightness on her face which the gloom of the library could not obscure. Guy felt that she was right. He went to the windows, and threw them open, one by one. The sun and air streamed in, dazzling, intoxicating; and, in the midst of the exquisite blue and gold of the young morning, Lady Francheville sat at the desk, leaning her chin on her hand, softened, changed, with a look almost of happiness on her still face.

For a moment she sat lost in her dream. Then she turned to Guy.

“I sent for you to speak to you.”

“I am ready to hear what you have to say.”

She looked at him with a detached, impartial air. It seemed to him that she was about to pass a judgment of some kind upon him.

“I suppose you know what it is?”

“He took me up last night—yes.”

“He took you to the door,” she said coldly.

“You did not go in. . . . Have you realised, Guy, that some day you will have to go in?”

“No!”

The word broke from him like a cry of actual

pain. He looked at her with horror written in his eyes. But she surveyed him still with an impartial air.

“Some day you will have to go in,” she repeated, with a sort of icy persistence. “I am not immortal; Spence will not live for ever. The secret is not one that can be trusted to anyone. Either you will have to find someone you can trust thoroughly, or you will have to go in yourself.”

Guy was silent for a moment.

“Something else might happen. It—he—might die.”

The icy patience of Lady Francheville’s face was disturbed for an instant, and her eyes softened.

“Yes—he may die.”

There was a strange sound in her voice—a sound almost of hope. Guy met her eyes and understood.

“You pray that he may die,” he said in a low voice. “That is the miracle for which you pray in the church of Saint-Maure.”

Her eyes drooped suddenly, and her voice trembled. The sound of hope had left it.

“No—that was not the miracle. Not at first, at least. At first I had faith—I prayed

that he might recover. Now I know that he can only die.”

“Perhaps your prayer may be heard.”

“I hope so. But, if not, what will you do?”

“I can’t go in.”

“You must.”

Her tone was final. There was no appeal from it. Guy was silent.

“You must. Why should you escape what we have borne for so long? You will go in. There is nothing else to be done.”

“Why should I keep your secret?” he asked, almost angrily.

For the first time he saw that he had really moved her.

“You would tell everyone what your father and I have sacrificed our lives to keep secret! You would betray us to the vulgar curiosity of the whole world!”

He felt that she was shocked and startled—it was a solution of the difficulty which had never occurred to her. And suddenly he knew that he could not betray her secret.

“No—I didn’t mean that. It would be a horrible thing to make public.”

But she did not seem to be reassured. He read suspicion in the look she gave him. He

could understand how much she shrank from the very idea that the secret which she had kept so well might be revealed to a world with which she had had so little to do. All her pride was in arms at the thought of her long martyrdom becoming a mere vulgar nine days' wonder. For all her coldness, her self-possession, her almost superhuman courage, on this one point she was morbidly sensitive. It was as though once, in a blameless life, she had committed some peculiarly outrageous and disgraceful act, and Guy held the secret, and threatened to betray her.

"Yes—it would be a horrible thing to tell," she said, in a tone which trembled slightly. "You would not do such a thing, for your own sake. You must not—you shall not."

"I have said that I don't mean to."

"But I do not trust you, Guy. How am I to trust you? To get out of doing something distasteful to you, you would tell anything—I am sure of that."

Guy coloured angrily.

"You don't hold a high opinion of me."

"Do you deserve that I should? You ran away once. The man who runs away once is likely to do so again. You are the sort of

person who always avoids his responsibilities. You have the artistic temperament—you only care for the pretty things of life.”

Her tone was too sad to be contemptuous, and he could not resent the truth of her words.

“The artistic temperament is not wholly despicable.”

She did not seem to notice his protest.

“We have given our whole lives to keeping the secret—your father and I. We too might have run away, but we did not. We were responsible for the existence of this being, and we could not desert it. It is of our flesh and blood—you must always remember that, Guy. You bear its name, you are what it, but for its misfortune, would be—you owe it everything. At this moment, you have no right to call yourself Francheville, in your father’s place, no right to spend a penny of the money you inherit. You are merely Guy Hilmour, the younger son—you are nothing. The least you can do is to keep the secret, and not abandon your brother to the care of strangers.”

Your brother! The word struck a strange chill to Guy’s heart.

“I give you my word of honour that I will keep your secret,” he said quickly.



GUY escaped from the library into the open air. He felt that he would have liked to leave Mon Paradis at once, for ever, and never hear or think of it again. He walked through the gardens, full of flowers and sunshine, and he hated the roses and heliotrope, the scarlet trumpet-flower clambering over hedges of starry myrtle, the swallow-tailed butterflies darting to and fro across the beds. The beauty which surrounded him on every side seemed to him a mask covering a hidden horror which for one moment had been laid bare to him. The beauty of the mask would never deceive him again, for he had seen what lay beneath it.

He was not conscious of any settled idea of his destination; all he asked was to escape, for an hour at least, from this place which in a night had become horrible to him. He passed the long lines of melancholy palms, grave and graceful, with their air of perpetual exile and sadness, the grey, twisted olives, which seemed, like trembling old beggars, to hold out im-

ploring hands for an alms always denied them. He did not know what magnet had drawn him on until he stood on the empty quay at Saint-Maure, before the porch of the empty, weather-beaten little church. Then he stood still. With a sort of bitter amusement he wondered whether he too had come there to ask for a miracle.

He could not have told what impulse made him enter the church. In spite of the sunshine without, it seemed darker than ever, colder, and perhaps sadder. He looked at the votive hearts and told himself that they had been offered in vain; he looked at the hanging ship and the cry of drowning sailors rang in his ears. He remembered the look in Lady Francheville's face when she said, "At first I had faith—I prayed that he might recover. Now I know that he can only die," and a vast and bitter sadness seized him. It seemed to him that the little church was filled with the ghosts of unanswered prayers, with the voices, more ghostly still, of those who had sought for the performance of a miracle there, and had been disappointed. They cried together in the silence, in the heavy gloom which dwelt under the dark old pillars. They mocked at the

feeble tapers which glimmered eternally on the altar, they mocked at the waxen hearts and the hanging ship, and at the credulity of those who had placed them there. They mocked at the heart of man, more senseless than the hearts of wax, which hopes always for the miracle of a granted prayer, a happiness always sought and never found, always desired and never attained.

It seemed to him, as he stood there, that something within him was dead. He felt a cold weight at his heart. All the hopelessness of the centuries seemed to have found a home in this place in which he had once almost believed that a miracle might be performed. All the sadness of the grey old years in which men had hoped and prayed and been denied that for which their prayers had been offered clung to the crumbling pillars like a palpable vesture of melancholy and decay. Why had he once said that the soul of this place was beautiful? Its soul was like its body—old, and hopeless, and worn out.

To Guy, at that moment, the waxen hearts seemed horrible phantoms, the votive ship dreadful as that spectral vessel, dark-sailed, mysterious, a shadow of fear in the blue Mediterranean night—that vessel of air which,

as a fisher of the gulf had once told him, hovers batlike along that coast, waiting to bear away the souls of men.

He could bear the gloom no longer. Turning swiftly, he went out, and let the door crash heavily behind him.

Outside, the blue sea and sky dazzled him. Their brightness struck him like an actual blow. Away across the gulf the fishing-boats were going out from Saint-Tropez like a flight of birds with widespread wings of amber and orange and pearl. And the beauty of that blue sea seized him, answering his tortured questions with its laughter, blotting out alike hope, and horror, and despair, mocking at the empty, sun-baked little church and its shrines of dead beliefs, and miracles which had never been performed.

Never until that moment had he seen that beauty at its utmost; and the thing that had seemed dead within him sprang suddenly into life. And he trembled, standing there in the sunshine, because he knew that the thing was sheer, pagan hatred—hatred of the deformity which had made this beauty of sea and sky—no, of life itself—hateful to him; hatred of the horror which Lady Francheville had dared to call

his brother. For that moment, the riddle of existence ceased to trouble him. He forgot the horror which had sickened him, the despair which had stifled him. He was almost happy in the realisation of a feeling so intense that it seemed to lift him suddenly into a world blazing with lurid light and colour. As, on the night of Mrs Kent's memorable second dance, he had felt himself raised above the ordinary plane of humanity by another passion, so now he was conscious of an almost terrible exultation, which seemed to master him, to sweep him away upon stormy and unfathomable seas, without fear, without remorse, without even one respectable rag of doubt to veil the nakedness of his soul from the strange inner vision which, for that one instant, looked upon it, exulting, and unafraid. He stood there, at the door of the yellow little church, looking with intent, yet unseeing eyes at the blue Mediterranean—the most beautiful, mysterious, and heartless of all the seas; and he knew that with every fibre of his body, every impulse of his soul, he hated the Unseen Thing.

### **III. IT GOES**





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#### XVI

It was nearly a year later that Guy, hurrying along the Rue de Rivoli in the misty dusk of a November evening, fell violently into the arms of a tall man who was glancing, for the moment, over his shoulder. The tall man stopped to apologise, full in the light of a shop window glittering with particularly brilliant paste; and Guy found himself, with no very striking sensation of pleasure, looking straight into the face of Julian Strange.

Julian showed no marked signs of pleasure at the encounter, either.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, rather stiffly. “Didn’t see who it was.” His tone suggested regret for the apologies he had offered. “It’s a long time since we met—I hope you’re pretty fit.”

He looked curiously at Guy as he spoke. But Guy, who had never borne malice on account of Julian’s very frank opinion of his

behaviour at the time of Grace's accident, seemed disposed to be friendly.

"You're stopping in Paris?"

"I crossed to-day. I'm at the Richembourg."

Insensibly they had begun to walk on, side by side. Guy laughed.

"I'm at the Richembourg, too. Look here, Julian, I'm glad we met. Suppose we let bygones be bygones? Will you dine with me?"

Julian hesitated perceptibly. On the occasion of their last meeting he had called Guy a cad and a coward. He had not the slightest idea of apologising for having done so, and he had never seen the least reason for regretting a perfectly honest expression of opinion. But he did not, considering the circumstances, wish to reject Guy's advances.

Guy guessed the reason of his hesitation.

"You needn't think about our last interview," he said frankly. "You only said to me then what I've said thousands of times to myself since. I was everything you called me, and a great deal more. But I don't think there's any reason why we should keep it up now."

An expression of pain flickered for a moment over Julian's usually rather inexpressive face.

"No—I suppose there isn't," he said, with

a touch of bitterness. "The tomahawk is buried, as we should have said when we were children—we may as well smoke the pipe of peace over the tomb. I shall be pleased to accept your rather generous invitation."

"I am not in the least generous," Guy said gravely.

They talked of the weather as they walked back to the hotel. At dinner they discussed the affairs of mutual acquaintances with the air of languid indifference characteristic of the properly brought up Briton. At last Guy broached the subject which had occupied their thoughts all the time.

"I suppose you went to the wedding?"

Julian lighted himself a cigarette before he answered. He lighted it slowly, and with rather an unusual amount of care. Then he leaned back in his chair and met Guy's eyes across the table.

"Yes, I went. Do you want to hear about it? It was quite a smart function. There were at least two first-class royalties, and half-a-dozen quite presentable duchesses. The bride looked charming, in a gown of—— I suppose I needn't describe the gown. The bridegroom was oily amiability in human form. The pre-

sents were magnificent. And Sir Joseph and Lady Meyringer left afterwards for Paris, *en route* for Monte Carlo, where the honeymoon will be spent. Good God! To think of Grace on a honeymoon with Joseph Meyringer!”

His cigarette, in spite of its careful lighting, had gone out. Guy looked at him sympathetically.

“Poor old Ju!” he said, in the tone he would have used ten years ago. “It’s hit you pretty hard.”

“Hit me hard—!” Julian paused for a moment. “I think that’s why I came to dinner with you,” he said. “I’ve kept quiet as long as I could. I’ve looked pleasant, and said the proper thing until I feel I want to murder someone. I must speak of her to someone, and you cared for her too—you’ll understand.”

Guy sat very still.

“Poor old Julian!” he said presently. “Yes—I understand. Go on.”

Julian flung away his cigarette, and leaned forward across the table.

“How’s one to go on?” he said, with a sort of fierce misery. “How’s one to glue the pieces together again, and go on with the wretched, patched-up muddle that one calls life?”

If you had married her, I could have borne it—she'd have married you because she loved you better than she could love me, and you would have made her happy. But to see her sell herself to a man like that—*Grace!* One thinks what one thinks of the women who do that sort of thing—but to have to think it of her is simply sheer, intolerable agony.”

“I'm frightfully sorry for you,” Guy said gently.

“Don't be sorry for me. I'm not thinking of myself, but of her. We thought her—what did we think her, Guy? What *didn't* we think her? And the end is—Joseph Meyringer and his millions, and a honeymoon at Monte Carlo!”

“I never thought Grace cared a straw about money,” Guy said, in a puzzled tone.

“No more did I. But she refused me because I hadn't enough, for all that—told me so, outright. No one can say she hasn't been quite honest. Meyringer, even, can't have any illusions. She told everyone quite frankly that she was marrying for money. Poor Aunt Georgie is positively ashamed of her.”

“It's an extraordinary state of things. Is Meyringer really such a brute?”

“I should never have supposed Grace could



have endured him under the same roof with her. Well—you never know women. I give them up. I shall never believe in one again.”

He mastered his passion of anger and despair, and sat looking at Guy dumbly. He had almost forgotten his opinion of Guy. A common sense of loss, a mutual disillusionment, had driven them back to their old intimacy as nothing else could have done.

“You know your grandfather is rustling the social dovecotes?” he said presently, in a calmer tone. “What—you don’t? There are dire and dreadful tales being told of him in London. He has been trailing round Europe with a most compromising companion. You had better look the old gentleman up, Guy—he must be falling into his second dotage.”

“Who on earth is the compromising companion?”

Julian laughed rather savagely.

“A girl just out of a convent, my dear boy—a certain Miss Nina Standish. You remember Standish, don’t you?—Haughton Standish, the man there was such a fuss about in the Guards? They chucked him out—or he resigned his commission. They swore he cheated at cards. You can see him any day at

Monte Carlo. I think he sleeps under one of the tables—at any rate, he's always there. And he doesn't always know his own losses from other people's winnings."

"I remember him. He spoke to the old man on the Terrace one day—he looked the sort of person you wouldn't trust to give you change for half-a-sovereign. I think the old man was sorry for him—he always was rather fond of scoundrels. He labours under the touching delusion that they are more amusing than honest men."

"They are only amusing as long as you can keep their hands out of your pockets."

"The old man ought to be equal to that," Guy said, smiling. "But what about Standish's daughter?"

"She isn't his daughter. Her mother was Eugénie Cabardés—the great and famous and infamous Eugénie. You remember the meteoric career she had. She began as a flower-girl at Arles, and ended as an unofficial empress—or rather, she didn't end there, for after the Emperor died she was left with an enormous fortune, and Standish picked up with her and married her for the sake of the money. Of course he got through every sou of the money,

and Eugénie drank herself to death, which was the wisest thing she could do, all things considered. And now all that is left to Standish is the girl, whom he calls his daughter. One feels rather inclined to pity her for being insulted by such a relationship—at any rate, she can hardly deserve a worse fate. And now Standish, or the girl, has fastened on to Lord Newtown. They went to Paris with him last winter—they were in Switzerland with him in the summer; and now they are all comfortably established in a villa at Nice.”

“I never heard all this. But I suppose the old man would hardly be likely to mention it in his letters.”

“Hardly. If I were you, I would run down to Nice and see him.”

“I offered to go the other day, but he put me off. After all, he’s old enough to take care of himself, Julian. I can’t very well interfere.”

“It’s your own affair, of course,” Julian said, as he rose to say good-night, “but if you don’t interfere, all I can say is—don’t blame me if you wake up some fine morning to find that you have a new grandmother, and that her name is Nina Standish, *alias* Cabardés.”

Guy started a little, and then laughed.

“Oh, come, Julian—surely it’s not as bad as that? You don’t think the old man would be mad enough to marry her?”

“There’s no fool like an old fool, they say,” Julian answered, with rather a bitter laugh, “unless, of course, it’s a young one.”

## XVII

Guy sat for a long time after Julian left him, lost in unpleasant reflection. Julian's anger and disgust at Grace's marriage had had a considerable effect upon him. It was so absolutely unlike Grace, as they both knew her, to marry a man like Meyringer for the sake of his money. He wondered what could have induced her to behave in such an extraordinary way—he wondered, even, why she had not accepted Julian, to whom he would have given her up with the certainty that she would at any rate be sure of a fair chance of quite unusual happiness. He wondered whether she had married Meyringer out of pique, rather than for any mercenary motive. He devoutly hoped that she had not. In some way he felt guilty, as he thought of the marriage—he felt that Grace would be miserable, and that he would be responsible for her misery.

He had never seen her since the morning of the accident. After his father's death he had remained abroad. He had left Mon Paradis,

which had become intolerable to him, and wintered in Rome. In the spring Lady Francheville had suddenly joined him there. It was an unusually cold spring. She had gone out driving one treacherous afternoon. Perhaps her long residence at Mon Paradis had unfitted her for any other climate. She had an attack of pneumonia, and within the week she was dead.

Guy was shocked and startled and bewildered by this fresh catastrophe—he could hardly, with the best of intentions, call it a source of acute personal grief to him. His mother had always held aloof from him; latterly she had treated him almost as one treats an enemy, or at any rate, as one might treat a person with whom one is forced to keep up a certain outward show of intimacy, but of whose intentions one entertains the most damaging suspicions. He felt that she suspected his hatred of the Unseen Thing—the horror which, as Spence had said, she loved in some strange way as she had never loved Guy. The Unseen Thing had stood between them always, in the years that had passed before he learned the secret of the barred window of Mon Paradis; in those last few months it stood between them more openly



still. He felt that Lady Francheville hardly believed in his promise to keep the secret. Just before she died she made him repeat it—and he felt, with indescribable sensations of humiliation and remorse, that she died with a doubt of him in her mind, and with all her pity and sympathy fastened, not upon him, but upon the human monstrosity far away in its secret room. He felt, too, that, in spite of her heroic courage and patience through years which must have brought her nothing but the keenest and most exquisite torture, he could not force himself to regard her with any sentiment warmer than an almost incredulous admiration. She had performed the impossible, borne the unbearable; but she had also denied him that share of her affection to which he had a right—she had lavished all she had to give upon the Unseen Thing. It was a beautiful injustice, perhaps, but it was injustice, and he could not but resent it. He pitied her profoundly; he pitied himself only a little less. And, because she had given it all, and had given him nothing, he had no pity left for the Unseen Thing.

He left Rome, and drifted about Italy, in an aimless way. Wherever he went, the shadow of the towers of Mon Paradis seemed to stretch

out towards him, to envelop his soul in an atmosphere of gloom. He could put hundreds of miles between him and the secret room, but he could not escape from the memory of what it held, he heard always the awful voice which cried beyond that bolted door. Sooner or later he knew that the moment would come when he must stand again in the little antechamber of stone, and hear the dreadful despair of that monstrous voice change to a hope more dreadful still. And the thought of that moment would rise before him as the memory of his crime must rise before a murderer who has escaped justice. It filled him with indescribable panic—he almost wondered that the people with whom his wanderings brought him in contact did not recoil from him, did not read his secret in his face, and turn away from a man upon whom had fallen such a curse.

He wandered aimlessly about Europe, trying to escape from the darkness which so ruthlessly pursued him. He hated the South, he hated everything that reminded him of Mon Paradis. He fled to Switzerland, and proceeded to climb unclimbable peaks as though they had been ant-heaps, with a recklessness which horrified his guides. The proverbial insanity of the entire

English nation established itself firmly in their stolid Swiss minds. They regarded Guy with an almost superstitious reverence, as a being bearing a charmed life.

But, in the white silence of the unclimbable peaks, Guy began to hear once more the voice from which he fled. He left Switzerland and a reputation for daring mountaineering in which he was totally uninterested, and fled to Paris. He was beginning to feel desperate, to understand the sensations of a hunted fugitive upon whose heels Fate presses hard. He was beginning to feel that he had heard, if he had not seen, the "thing too much." When he fell up against Julian Strange in the Rue de Rivoli he was actually wondering how much longer his brain would stand the strain, and whether a revolver would not solve the riddle of his tortured existence more simply and successfully than anything else.

The evening spent in Julian's society had done him good. The revolver retreated into the background of his thoughts. He wondered why Grace had married Meyringer; he wondered what on earth Lord Newtown, that astute old worldling, was doing at Nice with that very shady ex-Guardsman, Haughton Standish, and the daughter of Eugénie Cabardés.

He was not seriously anxious about Lord Newtown, who had always seemed to him pre-eminently fitted to take care of himself. If he chose to lose money to Standish, presumably he had reasons of his own for doing so.

But next morning, curiously enough, there arrived a discreet and politely worded note from the long-suffering and angelically forbearing creature who enjoyed the uncomfortable distinction of waiting upon Lord Newtown's pleasure—or displeasure. He hoped he had not taken a great liberty in writing, but his lordship had been very bad. The doctor thought the gout was going to the heart. And though it wasn't his place to say anything—well, no doubt my lord (Guy) knew *that* Captain Standish's reputation. And Miss Nina, though he hadn't a word against her (which struck Guy as curious), knew as much about illness as a kitten. And—to conclude—he humbly took it upon him to suggest that a surprise visit to Nice would not come amiss, and remained most respectfully Guy's very obedient servant, S. Perkins.

Guy took the letter to Julian, who read it with a not very genial expression of countenance.

“S. Perkins seems a most valuable servant,” he said. “You had better go, Guy.”

“You see what he says about the girl, though.”

“Ah, I’ve heard that said of the girl before. From what I can make out she’s a young person who isn’t easily classified. I’ve heard her described by two people sitting at the same table as a model of all the proprieties, and a kind of spirit of the Brocken. I should say she fully carries out the Scriptural phrase of being all things to all men. S. Perkins may behold her in the light of a model of all the proprieties; but your respected grandfather, if I know anything of his little ways, is much more likely to be interested in the spirit of the Brocken.”

“That’s very true,” Guy admitted, much amused.

Twenty-four hours later he found himself at Nice, waiting before the open door of ex-Captain Standish’s villa. Standish clung, with the impudence of utter shamelessness, to his military title. He was quite particular about it—quite huffy if strangers ignored it. He was decidedly a scoundrel with an air, Guy remembered, as he stood waiting for someone to inquire his business. He had a good view of a rather shabby interior, with palms in tubs, and a sickly-looking orange-tree, and faded rugs,



and a rather dirty tessellated pavement. He was not very favourably impressed. The white of the exterior was dingy, the green shutters had a decayed look; and he thought, considering all things, that Haughton Standish need not have outraged common decency by christening his abode “Villa Impériale.”

A slight sound in the otherwise deserted interior arrested his attention. A large raven hopped out from some corner, rather pointedly finishing his lunch. The lunch appeared to have consisted of mouse—*au naturel*. The remains of the victim’s tail dangled forlornly from the deadly-looking black beak, and there was a twinkle of unctuous satisfaction in the raven’s one eye. He paused full before Guy, gulped down the tail, shook himself, and began to arrange his rusty and disreputable coat. Julian’s allusion to the spirit of the Brocken seemed to fit the apparition so neatly that Guy almost laughed in the raven’s face.

At that moment a door opened and a girl appeared.

Guy was conscious of an inward shock. She wore a white muslin frock as redolent of youth and innocence as anything Paris could supply, and a white frilled sun hat, which had slipped



back upon her shoulders. She did not look a day over fifteen. He did not know whether she was pretty, but he could not take his eyes off her.

The raven gave her an affectionate glance out of its one eye, and promptly flew up on her shoulder and sat there, with the grace of a petted canary. She looked at Guy and spoke, quite casually, as though she had known him from her cradle, and had only parted from him five minutes ago.

“He’s caught a mouse,” she remarked, in a high, clear, silvery voice, “and he’s eaten it, every bit, and he’ll be dreadfully sick to-morrow—you see, mouse never agrees with him. Do you want to see Lord Newtown, or papa?”

“Is Lord Newtown at home?” Guy asked, rather stiffly.

“He’s very much at home. They thought the gout was going to his heart, but it’s only gone to his temper. I sat in the corridor all the morning, listening to him swearing at Perkins. It was quite as amusing as a play. I had to put my handkerchief half down my throat, or I should have laughed. You’re his grandson, aren’t you?”

This was delivered with the most artless

access of interest. Guy looked at her. He did not know which was the more amazing, her absolute, almost impudent frankness, or the fact that nothing she said could detract from the charm of her clear voice, and the magic of a manner perfectly natural and spontaneous.

“Yes, I am his grandson,” he admitted, relenting.

She gave him her hand with a condescending sweetness which reduced him to such depths of astonishment that he actually took it. It was a very pretty, aristocratic-looking hand. Its fellow, long-fingered, delicate, artistic in every line, was occupied in removing the debris of the mouse from the edge of the raven’s beak as it sat, like an incarnate omen of ill, on her shoulder.

“I’m glad to see you,” she said heartily. “I’ve seen your photo. You’re very good-looking—you take after the old man. He’s a dear, when the gout hasn’t gone to his temper. Do you see this dress? He sent to Paris for it, and the hat too. He gives me heaps of things. He gave me a pearl necklace the other day, but papa got hold of it, and then of course——” she gave a fine, expressive shrug of her shoulders. “Do you know papa?”

“I have not that pleasure,” Guy said. In a social sense, no respectable individual could be said to “know” the amazing Standish.

“It’s very little pleasure,” the girl said, with another shrug. She looked Guy full in the face with eyes that sparkled suddenly. “I’m not really his daughter,” she said, with a sort of disgusted contempt. “My—my own father’s people are bad enough, I suppose, and unlucky enough, but they’re not his sort. I only know one of them, and that’s my cousin, Prince Constantine of Slavonia. He came to see maman once, and gave me chocolates and kissed me, and said I was like my father. I’m like *him*—I cut his picture out of the paper afterwards, because he was kind to me, and when my nurse took me to Mass I used to pray that I might grow up like him.”

Somehow Guy was touched. He looked more kindly at the girl who had prayed that she might grow up like the only relation she had who had been kind to her. He almost forgave her for being Eugénie Cabardés’ daughter.

“I have played tennis with your cousin,” he said. “Now, won’t you ask my grandfather if he will see me?”

She took him up at once. The raven on her shoulder looked back at him and winked its one expressive, devilish, human eye. Guy had never seen anything so eloquent as that wink. Mephistopheles never approached such a masterpiece of uncanny, fiendish humour.

Lord Newtown was sitting up by the window of his room. Nina introduced his grandson in her casual, graceful way.

“Lord Francheville’s turned up,” she said. “You said he would. I like him. I hope he’ll take me over to Monte Carlo while he’s here.”

Lord Newtown grinned amiably enough. He was fond of Guy, and he was far too complete an autocrat to care what Guy might think of his extraordinary *ménage*.

“He won’t do anything of the sort,” he said. “He’s a very well brought up young man, my dear Nina, and you’re—well, hang me if I know what you are. I’m eighty-four, and I know a good deal, but I don’t know much about you, and I don’t mind owning it. Take that pet devil of yours out of my sight—it’s my belief he’s a very near relation of yours. He’s Father Satan, and you’re Miss Satan. It’s only another way of saying you’re a woman. There—he’s winking at me, the brute! Nina, if you

don't remove him I shall throw something at him."

Nina went off, laughing, clutching the raven in her arms. She was kissing him as she shut the door. Guy felt suddenly rather sick. He found a chair, and sat down, and looked at his grandfather with a sensation of complete and absolute helplessness.

## XVIII

Guy remained at Nice. He told himself that his grandfather had had a sharp attack, and that he ought not to be left alone in the Standish villa. Lord Newtown seemed to enjoy his society. He used to sit in his big chair by the window which looked out into the garden behind—a handful of earth, and several palms in tubs—and Guy read the English papers to him. Everything that happened in the most mismanaged country in the world was always wrong, and the old man picked up wonderfully over the mistakes of everyone in office—or out of it. He abused the army, and threw out dark hints as to the probable collapse of the navy at the exact moment when it would be wanted; he described his native land, with much fervour, as a country peopled by humbugs and fools. And Nina would wander in and out of the room, with the raven on her shoulder, and laugh at him as no other human being had ever dared to do, in the whole course of his eighty-four years of existence.



“You don’t mean that,” she would say, interrupting him ruthlessly. “If I said it, you would jump on me at once. You like England, in your heart. So do I. I like you, I like Guy. May I call you Guy? It fatigues me to say your whole name—it’s too long. Nurse Dr Blanco for me, Guy. He hasn’t felt well to-day—I think he must have eaten another mouse.”

Dr Blanco was deposited on Guy’s knee, where he sat, winking in a mechanical way at space. And Nina, in one of her favourite white muslin dresses, would perch herself on the arm of Lord Newtown’s chair, and discourse airily of the amiable Standish’s last “system” at the tables, or the fact that he had not allowed her enough to pay the bills which were always coming due.

It generally ended in Lord Newtown, with many growls, writing her a cheque, and sending her out to pay Standish’s bills. She always came back with a large and expensive bouquet of flowers, which she presented to the old man with the air of one presenting an offering at a particularly venerable shrine.

“What do you think of her?” Lord Newtown demanded of his grandson one day.

“I don’t know,” Guy owned.

“And what do you think of me?”

Guy hastened to explain that he had never thought of his grandfather at all, in connection with Miss Standish. At which Lord Newtown laughed.

“Well, don’t you wonder why I’m here, living in the same house with Standish? He’s not a particularly amusing companion, and, by Jove, I don’t find him an economical one. I’m an old fool, Guy. I stay here because of the girl. She amuses me. I don’t like women—they have bored me all my life. Your grandmother was an angel, but she never had but two ideas in her head. The first was to get into the peerage, and the second was to get to heaven. I don’t mind saying that she bored me to extinction—it can’t hurt her now, poor thing. I’ve never met a woman yet who wasn’t either a hypocrite or a fool. If they’re angels, they bore you, and if they’re the other thing they pick your pockets.”

“And doesn’t Miss Nina pick your pockets?”

“My dear boy, she does that at Standish’s instigation. She wouldn’t ask for a pin for herself. She hates Standish, and she’s as proud as the devil.”

It was true that she hated Standish. Guy

thought that her hatred was very excusable. He hated Standish himself. He tried to snub him but found it impossible. Standish fastened on to him with leechlike tenacity. He "dear boy-ed" him until Guy was positively rude to him. He borrowed money of him. He talked to his shady acquaintances at Monte Carlo of his dear young friend Francheville. He even went so far as to introduce them to Guy at the villa. Some of them were English, most of them were French; but they were all equally impossible. They made love to Nina, who said things to them that Guy would have given several hundred pounds willingly to be able to say. Then she sat down and played cards with them, and cheated them frankly and openly, with a superb unscrupulousness which Guy could not but admire.

"They are beasts," she would say to him afterwards. "Of course I cheat them. I wouldn't cheat you, or the old man."

But, no matter what they thought of her expressed opinion, they usually came again. A good deal of high play went on at the Villa Impériale. Standish sat up until morning playing with his shady friends. Guy was invited to join these delightful parties, but he declined

with marked decision. He sat in Lord Newtown's room, and heard the murmur of voices, the clink of glasses below. Nina took refuge there too. She played *bézique* with Lord Newtown. Guy used to watch her leaning eagerly across the little card-table, with the raven perched on the back of her chair, and her eyes shining in the lamplight. He used to wonder whether she was pretty, whether she would ever escape out of the shady places in which her feet seemed so firmly set, and what sort of a woman she might become if she did. He wondered also whether he liked or disliked her. She had extraordinary charm. She was absolutely natural, she cared nothing for anyone's opinion, she said and did what she liked. And whatever she said or did, the mere fact of her doing it invested it with the most vivid interest.

But there were times when he pitied her. There were times when she raged at the life of the Villa Impériale. One day, walking with her on the Terrace at Monte Carlo, he surprised a tragic look in her eyes.

“What is the matter, Nina?”

“I was thinking,” she said, in an odd, wistful tone, “that you're about the only person in the world that I know, besides the old man, who

isn't shady—who's really nice. And you're a man. I don't know any women. Doesn't it seem odd when one thinks of all the women there are about, that I don't know a single one? When we were in Switzerland with the old man, I used to try to make friends with them at the hotels. I used to be very quiet, and very good, and very young—oh, but quite a baby!—and I used to get them to talk to me a little. But always directly afterwards they found out who I was, or who papa was, and then when they met me they didn't see me any more. It *hurt*.” She screwed up her expressive face. “Do you think it was quite kind of them? Of course I know it was because of poor maman—but she was dead, and I had done them no harm.”

“Poor Ninon!” Guy used his grandfather's pet name for her unconsciously. “You mustn't mind. Women are made like that.”

“Then I suppose it's just as well that I don't know any, for I should hate them. Guy, I like you—I like you awfully. Is it wrong to say that? I wouldn't say it to anyone else, but you're not shady, you're different, somehow.”

“It is good of you to like me,” Guy said gently.



“But you don’t exactly like me—you’re not sure about me. You think I’m interesting, but you don’t think I’m properly brought up. And of course, I’m not,” she ended, with a sigh.

On occasions like these Guy felt that she was wrong in saying he did not like her. He liked her less when she was entertaining some of Standish’s friends. She told them her opinion of them quite frankly, but she was complex enough to like their attentions. There were moments when she spoke wistfully of her odd life, as she had done on the Terrace to Guy; there were other moments when she flung herself into it recklessly, with a desperate determination to have all the fun she could get out of it.

“Not have anything to do with Toto?” she said to Guy on one of these occasions. “Oh, he’s most amusing! He proposed to elope with me last night. Shall I elope, Guy? It would be one way of getting away, and Toto’s rich. Of course I hate him, but I suppose one hates them all sooner or later.”

Guy was so genuinely shocked that she was enormously amused. She sat on the arm of a chair and nursed Dr Blanco while he lectured



her. At the conclusion of his lecture she shrugged her shoulders.

“Very well, I will not go this time, as you seem to mind it so much. But you know, Guy, it will end like that some day. I hate papa—and no one will marry me. I know that—it is no use to contradict me. It is because of poor maman—no one would like to marry her daughter. I am only to amuse them, that’s all.”

Guy was still more shocked. She listened to his warnings and entreaties with entire amiability, if with no very convincing expression of belief.

“But you wouldn’t marry me yourself, in spite of everything you say,” she remarked, with an air of triumph. “You know that perfectly well. And how am I to go on living with papa? Toto’s respectable compared with him.”

“I hope you will oblige me by not mentioning that objectionable young cad’s name to me again,” Guy said, really annoyed.

She shrugged her shoulders again, and kissed Dr Blanco tenderly on the top of his disreputable old black head.

“Oh, *very* well. Blanco, darling, he’s cross.

How much more pleasant ravens are than men!" she murmured in an aggrieved tone.

Five minutes later she was on her hands and knees, watching a mouse-hole with Dr Blanco. It would have been hard to say which was the more interested—the bird, or the girl. Guy wondered whether she had realised the gravity of half she said—and decided finally that she had not.

He repeated part of the conversation to Lord Newtown, who was very much amused. He did not seem to see the situation in its serious light.

"If I were a philanthropist, which I'm not," he said, "I would marry her and set her up in the world. She'd astonish London. It would keep me alive quite ten years longer to watch the succession of shocks that child would give Society."

"When she begins seriously to consider the advisability of eloping with de Mauxville," Guy said, "I think it is about time to leave off laughing, and do something definite. I don't know how you, who profess to have some sort of regard for her, can sit there and laugh at an incident like this. She was quite in earnest."

"Of course—of course. It's a beautiful

instance of the strength of heredity. Naturally she was in earnest."

Guy lost his temper.

"Excuse me, but I don't think it's at all funny," he said.

Lord Newtown stopped laughing, and looked at him keenly.

"You seem to be rather unduly anxious about Nina's future. Look here, Guy—don't make the mistake of taking her too seriously. And don't make a fool of yourself. Poor child, she was quite right. She's very amusing, but it wouldn't do to take her in any other way."

"I am not proposing," Guy retorted angrily, "to take her in any way at all."

He flung out of the Villa Impériale in a rage. He was so genuinely angry that he had forgotten all his own affairs—for five minutes at least he even forgot the existence of the Unseen Thing. And he was almost startled when he found that he had done so.

It was strange, but in the atmosphere of the Villa Impériale—an atmosphere of shadiness and shabbiness, of queer people and queerer ideas—Guy found that he was beginning to escape from the dreadful memory of Mon Paradis and its secret. He forgot, for hours together, the bolted door in the tower, and the horror which it hid. It was impossible to be morbid in the society of Nina Standish. And Nina was, to him, the prominent character at the villa. She stood out from the motley crowd of Standish's friends, an odd, whimsical, half-pathetic figure, at once childish and terribly precocious—a crude combination of the most glaring contradictions, the most opposite faults and virtues. He knew that she was absolutely truthful and honest with him; yet he often heard her invent the most shameless and ingenious lies to shield herself from Standish's anger, and she cheated the ardent Toto de Mauxville and his associates whenever she could be induced to play with them. She shocked all Guy's well-conducted

British prejudices half-a-dozen times a day; yet he found that if he kept away from the villa for twenty-four hours, he was glad enough to get back to it again. She found a hundred occupations for him. He was even reduced to cutting up Dr Blanco's dinner for him, or administering physic when that dark and mysterious bird had vulgarly overeaten himself. He took Nina to Monte Carlo, and strolled round the tables, and had visions of Standish at his usual favourite occupation of winning someone else's cash. Once there was a row—Standish had mistaken someone else's winnings for his own. It was an animated scene, and Nina, rather to Guy's disgust, enjoyed it immensely. She hoped, as she explained afterwards, that papa would get a thrashing. Standish, however, managed to slip out of the affair without personal damage to himself—he had had some experience of slipping out of the tight corners of existence. He drank more brandy and water that night than usual, and took Guy out among the palms in their tubs in the garden and smoked with him, much against his will, and bewailed the ill-fortune which had so persistently and unjustly pursued him all his life.

“From my earliest years, dear boy,” he said

pathetically, "I've had the most devilish bad luck. Ah, your heart would bleed for me if I told you the truth! I've never done a man a kindness yet, but he kicked me downstairs five minutes later—human nature's an ungrateful thing, dear boy! Now I feel you're so different—the minute I set eyes on you, I said to myself that you'd a good heart. Now you couldn't oblige me with a loan till the end of the quarter, could you?"

Guy escaped from an unpleasant impasse by assenting; and Standish all but wept upon his breast.

"Ah, I knew the minute I saw you that you'd a feeling disposition. You take a weight off my mind. It's not for myself I care, but for my sweet child, my darling Nina." Standish was always particularly fond of Nina when he was drunk. "We were talking of Nina, were we not, my dear young friend?"

"I don't think so," Guy said drily. "We were talking of your financial position."

"Ah, but it's all the same thing. Now I wanted to speak to you about my sweet Nina. I'm so glad to see your kindness to her. You took her over to Monty this afternoon. I wouldn't say it to anyone but you, but I can



trust the dear child with you, Francheville—I feel she's so safe with you."

Guy began to feel slightly uncomfortable.

"I should hope," he said, rather coldly, "that any lady who honoured me with her society would have every reason for feeling safe. I take as much care as I can of Miss Nina."

"I know it, I know it. It's a sad life for that sweet child. De Mauxville and that lot are bad company for her. See as much of her as you can, my dear boy—it will do her good. . . . Couldn't make it fifty, could you? I know you've such a feeling disposition!"

As a result of these artless confidences on the part of Standish, Guy took a few days over the Italian border. He did not confess it to himself at the time, but he was dreadfully bored. He missed Nina's impertinences more than he suspected. When he came back he brought her a little diamond butterfly she had once admired in her favourite shop at Monte Carlo. She was delighted. She told him frankly how much she had missed him.

"If you go again," she said decidedly, pinning on the butterfly, "I'll elope with Toto. Papa's been a perfect beast. I say, Guy, did you lend him any money the other day?"

“My dear Nina——”

“Oh, then, you did. Don’t do it again. He’s made a mess of things at Monty, and he’s been more or less screwed the whole time. It’s no use lending him anything—and you’ll never see it again. Ask the old man if you don’t believe me.”

Unfortunately Guy found it only too easy to believe her. And the problem of her future existence with Standish rather began to worry him. It could only end, as she herself had said, in disaster. At the same time he had a vague, uncomfortable feeling that Standish threw her in his way a good deal more than was necessary. Of course he wanted to get rid of her—and he wanted money. The situation was so painfully obvious, so openly sordid, that Guy could hardly conceal his disgust, and treat Standish with ordinary civility.

The crash came, of course, as it was bound to come. Standish was giving one of his card parties. Nina had taken refuge with Lord Newtown. When Guy rose to go she went downstairs with him. She had opened the door, and stood there, laughing at something he had said, when the door of the *salon* was flung violently open, and Standish appeared.

“I want my dear child to sing,” he announced, in a high, maudlin voice. “Toto wants my dear child to sing. Toto has a very feeling disposition. He loves music. Nina, come and sing to Toto.”

Guy was half way out of the door; he would have given worlds to have been out of the gate. But at that moment Toto, of the feeling disposition, appeared grinning behind Standish. Half-a-dozen other choice spirits dropped their cards, and joined the amiable pair. A glance showed Guy that they had not taken their cards undiluted. He shut the front door suddenly, and faced Standish.

“Miss Nina is tired, and wants to go to bed,” he said, as civilly as he could. “She can’t sing for you now, Standish.”

“Can’t sing for me? And for whom should she sing, if not for me? For you, perhaps?” Standish cried, passing suddenly from a musical and sentimental melancholy to open wrath. “For you—eh? What the devil do you mean by telling me what she can and can’t do? Does she belong to you? Why do you take her to Monty so often—eh? Why are you always hanging about her? I’ll wring your neck, if you don’t take care!”

The situation was about as unpleasant as it

could be. Toto de Mauxville, to his credit be it recorded, tried to get Standish back to the *salon* before he could say any more. But Standish was fairly started on his career as an eloquent and aggrieved parent.

“My dear child turns against me because of you,” he cried shrilly. “You poison her mind against me—you take her to Monty! She won’t sing for me. She prefers you. What are you going to do—eh? I won’t have this going on. Are you going to marry her, you young scoundrel—tell me that! Or do you wish to force me to take your life?”

This was final. Guy planted himself in front of Nina, who was very white. For once she seemed really frightened.

“You are talking nonsense, Standish,” he said. “You’ll think differently to-morrow morning. You don’t want to take my life. Be a good fellow now, and let Miss Nina pass—this is no place for her.”

But Standish, who was barring the staircase, now sat down on the bottom step and declared loudly that he would have Guy’s blood before he slept. And Nina gripped Guy’s arm with shaking hands, and seemed on the point of breaking down.

“Don’t go!” she said in his ear. “I’m afraid of them—don’t go!”

No one seemed to know what to do. Standish was making the most unpleasant accusations against his late dear young friend in a voice that could be heard half way down the street. Guy wondered exactly how drunk he was—or was not. There seemed a ghastly flavour of the premeditated *scena* about his outburst, and the particular turn his intoxication had taken.

“Why can’t you persuade him to go back to his game?” Guy said, in despair, appealing to Toto de Mauxville, who looked almost as uncomfortable as he himself felt.

“Me, I can do nothing,” Toto murmured, with a faint shrug. “He talk like this all the evening. He say you flirt with Miss Nina, you turn her against him—but me, I know nothing of what he say,” he added hastily, with a glance at Guy’s face.

At that moment Nina broke into angry tears.

“He’s a beast,” she cried, “and so are you. I hate you—I hate you all. It’s a trap—you heard us come down and trapped us. Papa, let me go upstairs. I hate you—you’re not half as drunk as you seem. You’ve made this scene on



purpose—and Guy will never come near me again, and it will be your fault.”

There was such a startling air of truth about her explanation, and such genuine indignation in the tone in which it was offered, that Standish rose, and recoiled from the bottom of the staircase, with incoherent remarks about vipers which he had nursed in his bosom, and which had now turned and rent him. Nina did not stop to listen, but made good her escape. Guy, infinitely relieved, turned to the door once more. He left, pursued down the path by highly spiced remarks from Standish, whose thirst for his blood seemed still to be troubling him considerably.

But next morning the absurd scene had put on a complexion which was something more than ridiculous. Guy could not go again to the Villa Impériale. He went to Monte Carlo instead, and walked on the Terrace. He knew that Grace and Meyringer were at Monte Carlo, but he never even thought about them. He was wondering how he could manage to see Nina Standish again.

Two days went by, and then three, and four, and five. He could not bring himself to leave Nice. Everywhere else, he knew, the horror of



the memory of Mon Paradis was waiting for him. Only in the little circle round Nina Standish he was safe from it—he forgot the secret room in the tower, and the bolted door. And he clung to the thought of Nina as a drowning man will cling to a plank.

He could not have told why he felt so safe with Nina. She was the only person who had the power to make him forget. He thought of her with sudden, passionate gratitude, as he realised this.

A week passed. He began to feel as he had felt in Switzerland, in Paris. He heard the cry of the Unseen Thing in the silence of the night. He remembered the moment which would surely come when he must stand face to face with the hidden horror.

He stood it for three days more; and then, deliberately, with a kind of cold determination, he went back to the Villa Impériale.

LORD NEWTOWN took it very quietly. He was fond of Nina, and he had no stupid, bourgeois prejudices, as he was fond of remarking on every possible occasion. Standish apologised handsomely, and repeated a great many times that he had always known his dear young friend had a good disposition and a feeling heart—yes, from the moment he first saw him. Nina, when the subject was broached to her, stood very still, and held her breath for a moment, and looked at Guy with wide, astonished eyes.

“You’re joking, aren’t you?” she said. “You don’t mean it. No one will ever marry me—really—because of maman.”

He made her understand at last that he was in earnest. To his utter astonishment, she burst into a violent fit of crying. She sobbed until he was quite alarmed—until Dr Blanco hopped out from under the sofa and showed signs of alarm too.

“I’m so glad—so horribly glad!” she said, when she could speak. “I shall get away from

it all, and not be shady any more. . . . Guy, if I marry you, people won't think me shady, will they? And those women who cut me in Switzerland won't do it again? Oh, I've hated it so, you don't know!"

Guy petted and consoled her. Somehow, in moments like these, her odd and precocious worldliness seemed to drop from her, and she became strangely childish and pathetic. She clung to him and cried with the abandon of infancy; and then she seized Dr Blanco in her arms and waltzed round the room.

"You dear old darling, we're going to be respectable at last!" she sang, fitting her words to a *café chantant* refrain popular that season. "We're going to marry Guy, and no one shall cut us any more. Guy, will you give Dr Blanco an engagement ring? He can wear it on his left leg, and he's much less likely to lose it than I am."

"You absurd child, I'm not engaged to that old devil, am I?"

She stopped in the middle of her dance and regarded him gravely.

"Oh, but he's a part of me, you know," she said. "I was fond of him when I had nothing else. You don't really mind him, do

you, Guy? You know, I can't give him up, poor dear."

"You may keep a flock of ravens, if you like," Guy said, recklessly.

He felt quite foolishly light-hearted. He had not realised how much in love he was with this queer young person. He told himself that now he was safe—he should never be afraid of the Unseen Thing with Nina at his side.

They were to be married as soon as possible. Standish was perfectly ready to part with his darling child at the shortest notice. Nina was anxious to get away from him. The sleepy Villa Impériale woke up suddenly. It blossomed into gaiety—a gaiety not in the least like anything it had known hitherto. Nina danced singing about the house. She seemed possessed by a spirit of laughter which no one could resist. Her radiant, childlike happiness infected even Lord Newtown, even Standish. She was delighted with herself, delighted with Guy. Dr Blanco wore her engagement ring on his left leg, and lost it once or twice a day, and was once found, with a dark and Satanic twinkle in his solitary eye, trying to bury it in the garden. It amused her tremendously—everything amused her. She shrieked with laughter at the melan-

choly note of congratulation which Toto de Mauxville wrote her.

“He wouldn’t have married me himself,” she said. “He needn’t be so heartbroken. I was only *pour rire*.”

“But you wouldn’t have married him, if he had asked you?” Guy put in, with a twinge of jealousy.

“To get away from papa? Oh yes, I would.”

“Nina,” Guy said sternly, “I hope you’re not marrying me to get away from Standish. You are the most extraordinary girl I ever met. Do you care for me at all? Sometimes I think you are fonder of Dr Blanco.”

He made the remark several times, and it always seemed to amuse her immensely.

“But I don’t know you half as well as Dr Blanco,” she would say, very gravely. “And besides, I’m not sure whether you’re really half as nice. And — Guy — you know, however much I liked a human being, I should never like him in the same way that I like things that are not human. You can’t trust them.”

“Not trust them?”

“Good gracious, no! You can trust a bird or a beast, but you can’t trust human beings. They wouldn’t be human if you could.”

Five minutes later she was sitting on the arm of Lord Newtown's chair, eating chocolates with the enjoyment of a child of seven. Guy looked at her, and remembered her flash of cynicism. He wondered whether he should ever understand her. He almost hoped not. And he wondered whether it was because he could not understand her that he was going to marry her.

One day she met him at the door of the villa with an eager face.

"Guy, I want you to do something. I want to see Mon Paradis. The old man says it's beautiful, and I want to see it—and, Guy, please, I can't wait. Take us all over there for a few days, and let me see it."

The blow was so sudden that Guy was silent for a moment. She came close to him and put a coaxing hand through his arm, and rubbed against him like a kitten asking for a saucerful of cream.

"Guy, do, please! Be a dear, and say yes."

He looked down at her entreating face. A sudden impulse seized him. He would do as she asked—he would go back to Mon Paradis with her, and defy the horror of the Unseen Thing. He had been miserable there—now he would be happy, defiantly happy, under the shadow of the towers which had once seemed to reach



across the world after him, and blot out, with their darkness, the light of life.

“Very well,” he heard himself saying. “We will go to Mon Paradis.”

It did not seem quite like his own voice that spoke. Afterwards he remembered that, and wondered whether it had been the voice of Fate—of the wayward, inscrutable destiny which meddles so mischievously with the affairs of men.

But Nina noticed nothing. She was frankly pleased.

“How nice of you! And, Guy, do tell me about it. Why is it called Paradise?”

He hesitated for a moment.

“My father called it Paradise,” he said at last.

“Because he was happy there?”

“No. Because he meant to be happy there.”

Nina laughed suddenly—an odd little, grating, elfish laugh.

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choly note of congratulation which Toto de Mauxville wrote her.

“He wouldn’t have married me himself,” she said. “He needn’t be so heartbroken. I was only *pour rire*.”

“But you wouldn’t have married him, if he had asked you?” Guy put in, with a twinge of jealousy.

“To get away from papa? Oh yes, I would.”

“Nina,” Guy said sternly, “I hope you’re not marrying me to get away from Standish. You are the most extraordinary girl I ever met. Do you care for me at all? Sometimes I think you are fonder of Dr Blanco.”

He made the remark several times, and it always seemed to amuse her immensely.

“But I don’t know you half as well as Dr Blanco,” she would say, very gravely. “And besides, I’m not sure whether you’re really half as nice. And — Guy — you know, however much I liked a human being, I should never like him in the same way that I like things that are not human. You can’t trust them.”

“Not trust them?”

“Good gracious, no! You can trust a bird or a beast, but you can’t trust human beings. They wouldn’t be human if you could.”

Five minutes later she was sitting on the arm of Lord Newtown's chair, eating chocolates with the enjoyment of a child of seven. Guy looked at her, and remembered her flash of cynicism. He wondered whether he should ever understand her. He almost hoped not. And he wondered whether it was because he could not understand her that he was going to marry her.

One day she met him at the door of the villa with an eager face.

"Guy, I want you to do something. I want to see Mon Paradis. The old man says it's beautiful, and I want to see it—and, Guy, please, I can't wait. Take us all over there for a few days, and let me see it."

The blow was so sudden that Guy was silent for a moment. She came close to him and put a coaxing hand through his arm, and rubbed against him like a kitten asking for a saucerful of cream.

"Guy, do, please! Be a dear, and say yes."

He looked down at her entreating face. A sudden impulse seized him. He would do as she asked—he would go back to Mon Paradis with her, and defy the horror of the Unseen Thing. He had been miserable there—now he would be happy, defiantly happy, under the shadow of the towers which had once seemed to reach

across the world after him, and blot out, with their darkness, the light of life.

“Very well,” he heard himself saying. “We will go to Mon Paradis.”

It did not seem quite like his own voice that spoke. Afterwards he remembered that, and wondered whether it had been the voice of Fate—of the wayward, inscrutable destiny which meddles so mischievously with the affairs of men.

But Nina noticed nothing. She was frankly pleased.

“How nice of you! And, Guy, do tell me about it. Why is it called Paradise?”

He hesitated for a moment.

“My father called it Paradise,” he said at last.

“Because he was happy there?”

“No. Because he meant to be happy there.”

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in some grey region between earth and heaven—some place of blessed silence, of wide, pale spaces, of infinite calm, the soul of the Unseen Thing might find itself at last, no longer tortured and imprisoned by the torture and imprisonment of the flesh—a soul no longer accursed, a thing delivered from the passing dominion of pain and fear into an exquisite eternity of forgetfulness and peace.

For a long time Guy sat there. He forgot his letters—he forgot that to-morrow would bring Nina, and Lord Newtown, and Standish, the shady and impossible.

He forgot also the look which had been on Spence's face as he passed with bent head out of the library of Mon Paradis.

NINA's arrival changed Mon Paradis. The ghosts which lingered in it—ghosts of the life-long suffering of two people—seemed suddenly to disappear. For twenty-four hours Guy, living in Mon Paradis, forgot the very existence of the Unseen Thing.

Nina was charmed with everything. She ran up and down the broad staircase down which Guy had seen his mother moving with the lamp in her hand on the night of his first arrival—up which he had followed his father on the night when the secret had been revealed to him; and her footsteps seemed to brush away the memory of those other footsteps, heavy with a burden too hard to bear, which had passed up and down before her. She walked on the terrace, and in the shadow of the palms; and the memories which sheltered there faded away.

“It's absolutely beautiful,” she told Guy, again and again. “Why didn't you tell me how beautiful it was? Why don't you care more for it? When we're married, I want to live here.”

“Here?”

“Why not?”

“It’s a good way away from everything,” Guy said, rather lamely.

“And is that why you don’t like it? Come, Guy, tell me the secret.”

They were in the library at the moment. Through the open windows came the hum of a conversation which Lord Newtown and Standish were carrying on just outside. Nina perched herself on the arm of the chair in which Guy was sitting, and rubbed her cheek caressingly against his shoulder.

“There is a secret, you know,” she said. “I felt it the minute I got inside the front door. It comes over me now and then, and gives me a cold feeling down the back. That’s why I love the place so. I like mysteries, and there’s a mystery here. I can feel it. And this morning I got hold of that nice groom who drove us over and pumped him—oh, absolutely dry, my dear! There’s a light that never goes out in one of the towers, and no one can find that particular tower, however hard they try. He never tried himself, because he has known other servants who did—and Spence always found out, he says, and had them dismissed. Not very nice of

Spence, I think. Now, Guy, you are not to get rid of that nice young man because he talked to me—do you hear? And tell me what's in the tower."

Guy sat up suddenly.

"There is nothing in the tower," he said curtly.

"Oh, Guy, how *can* you? And you always scold me so if I tell the very least little fib! Is it alive?"

"I cannot answer any questions about the tower, Nina."

"I knew it!" she cried triumphantly. "I knew there was something. I shall worry it out, if I have to pull Mon Paradis about my ears to do it, so I give you fair warning. I've heard of family secrets so often—I never thought I should have the luck to marry one, though. It's positively delightful!"

"Delightful!" Guy said. He looked at her radiant, laughing face. If she knew—would she be brave, as he could not be? If she knew, what difference would it make? Would she marry him still, or would she flee from Mon Paradis and all connected with it in horror, as he felt he would do, in her place? And, if she did—if he lost her—what was left to him, abandoned to the terror of the Unseen Thing?

“Nina,” he said gravely, “if you wish me to believe that you care for me at all you must promise that never, as long as you live, will you question me again about the lighted window in the tower. I was wrong to lie to you just now—I beg your pardon for doing so. If you knew all, you would understand the impulse which made me lie to you. But you must not try to discover the secret, as you call it—it isn’t the sort of mystery you can discover—it isn’t a joke, but something very sad and terrible. It has been an awful grief to my father and mother—it has almost driven me out of my mind, since I knew it. I tell you this to keep you from doing anything foolish. We will never speak of it again, but I had to say this, and I ask you not to joke about it, and never to speak of it any more.”

She looked at him curiously. The laughter had faded from her face. She hung her head, like a frightened child.

“Guy! There is really something—something terrible. I am sorry I asked you—I didn’t mean to be unkind, or to hurt you.”

Her penitence was charming. For five minutes Guy found it enchanting. Then he remembered that she had not promised.

“And you won’t try to find out?” he said, very gently.

Suddenly he felt her shiver; and he felt for a moment as though she was slipping from him—escaping into the great world, or into space, and leaving him alone with the terror of the lighted tower. He had a moment of panic.

“Nina—it doesn’t make any difference—it can’t make any difference! What’s the matter?”

She slipped off the arm of the chair, and eluded his grasp. For a moment she stood before him, looking at him. He could not read her face; but he thought she shrank from him a little, as though something frightened her: he thought there was a shadow of fear—or was it repulsion?—in her eyes.

“I told you a lie too just now,” she said, slowly. “I said I loved mysteries, and family secrets. I don’t—I hate them. There is one in my father’s family—I haven’t been able to sleep sometimes for thinking I heard——” She broke off, trembling violently. “I said that to make you tell me, and it was mean of me. And I’ll never ask you about it again, and I will never try to find out what it is.”

Guy felt that he ought to have been satisfied, but, curiously enough, he was not. He felt that



she, who was so seldom serious, was serious now. And it did not please him. He knew that she too feared the unseen terror—that not from her would he learn to defy it.

“Don’t let me know what it is!” she said. “I don’t want to hear—I hate mysteries. I only want to have a good time, Guy—and there are such horrid things in the world, aren’t there? I hate them, just as I hate a wet day—I was only made for the sun. There—why do you look so solemn? You might be Dr Blanco himself.”

Guy turned away from her, suddenly sick at heart. Only made for the sun—ah, he knew too well that she was right! Poor child, what had she to do with the dark things of the world—the unseen things of life that, to such natures as his, mean so terribly much? And he had trusted in her power to make him forget the secret chamber—he had believed that she could keep the horror at bay by her gaiety—or perhaps by her courage. It did not seem to him unnatural to look for such courage, even from her. His mother had taught him that women can sometimes be heroic with a heroism which is other than the heroism of men.

And now—at the first hint of mystery—she

recoiled, she put up her tragic, childlike plea. She was only made for the sun! Well—since his own sanity lay that way—he must keep her there, at all costs. He must keep her outside the shadow which had fallen on his life. He had not known, until then, that he had harboured a faint hope that some day she might come to know—some day she might help to share the burden of his own knowledge. Now that hope, small as it was, died. He knew that she must never learn the secret. She must stand always outside the shadow—in the sun.

Well, in a few days perhaps——

Someone knocked hastily at the door, and entered. It was François—pale and terrified.

“Spence — Spence——” he stammered, and then, seeing Nina, stopped.

“What about Spence?”

“He is ill—he is asking for my lord—or for you. We do not know—we think he does not know what he says. He—he is very ill,” the man said warningly.

Guy had become very white. Yes—he might have known Fate would play him this trick.

“I will come,” he said.

He would not have known that the voice speaking was his own. It had a strange sound,

He was saying to himself, with an impulse of sudden mad anger against the Fate that pursued him so steadily, “Spence is going to die—Spence is going to die!”

The last barrier—Spence! The last barrier between him and the Unseen Thing!

ALL through the long, bright, southern day Guy sat watching the final breaking down of that fragile barrier of an old man's life. The others were touched and astonished by his devotion. Standish murmured incoherent praises of his dear young friend's good heart—Nina was frankly bored by solitude. Guy refused to leave Spence. He was possessed by a vague fear that Spence, at the last, might betray the secret. But he need not have feared. For the greater part of the day the old man lay insensible. The doctor who had been sent for from Cannes gave no hope; and before sunset the barrier had gone down, and Guy was left to realise the fact as best he could.

He went to his own room. He had not seen the others all day, and now it wanted half-an-hour to dinner-time. He would have to go down, he would have to keep up a show of interest in what was going on—to talk, and eat, and drink—while all the time in his heart he stood face to face with the horror—while his

feet, in imagination, bore him up the secret staircase—while in his ears rang the cry of the dreadful Thing, crying, alone now in the world, behind the bolted door. To-night the hour would come—the inexorable hour which he had eluded for so long, which he could elude no more. He felt its grip upon him, like the grip of a tangible hand.

He was late for dinner. It did not matter, for Lord Newtown, who never postponed a meal for anyone or anything, was not likely to wait for him, as he knew. When he entered the dining-room, however, he found an atmosphere of unusual animation. A tall man, with a face he remembered, was very comfortably installed in the fourth place at the table.

He looked up as Guy entered, and rose, holding out a cordial hand. “I’ve taken you unawares, Francheville,” he said pleasantly. “I went to Nice, and thought I would drop in and congratulate Nina—my cousin—and found you had all flown here. So I brought the yacht on. I’m off to Africa in a day or two.”

Guy found voice for the usual commonplaces, and sat down. Constantine of Sclavonia was evidently very much at home in Mon Paradis. He explained to his silent host that there had

been a revolution in Pavlograd. Revolutions occurred there so frequently that it was hardly necessary to mention the fact, but this was a shade more serious than usual.

“The Mikhailovitches are in,” he said, with a gay shrug. “A nice time they will have, too—I wish them joy. I shall have six months’ liberty before they’re turned out and the unanimous voice of my devoted subjects recalls me to the throne of my fathers. It’s an excellent opportunity for enjoying myself—the chance of a lifetime. I shall have the holiday of my whole existence. I almost hope the Mikhailovitches may stay in for a year—but I suppose that is too much luck to expect.”

“But don’t you want to go back and fight them?” Nina asked him, over the table.

He glanced at her with a smile across the roses which bloomed so peacefully between them.

“No, my dear little cousin—I have not the least desire in the world to do anything of the kind. Besides, as a matter of fact, we managed the fighting before we came away. Pavlograd is mostly in ruins—when I go back, I shall make a little Paris of it, and invite you and Francheville to come and see it. Bah! Why do we



talk of such stupid things as revolutions? I have been in three of them already, and they are not the least amusing.”

“But was nobody killed?” Nina asked, wonderingly.

Constantine put down the glass he was in the act of raising to his lips. His eyes glittered unpleasantly across the roses.

“Yes,” he said quietly. “Several people were killed—friends of mine. When I go back, a good many more will be killed—in memory of them.”

He emptied his glass, and a chill seemed to descend on the table. Nina tried to laugh.

“Perhaps when you go back you will not care—you will forgive those people because you have forgotten your friends.”

Constantine laughed too.

“In Slavonia we are still in the Middle Ages,” he said lightly. “We have none of the vices of your Western civilisation. We haven’t yet learned to forgive—or to forget. We are not modern at all. We love our friends and hate our enemies. Life is a more simple thing in Slavonia, Nina, than it is in Nice.”

“Life in Nice is hateful!” Nina cried suddenly.

Constantine looked at her a little curiously.

“Is it?” he said. “That is because you are half Slavonian; the vices—I mean the virtues—of civilisation are too young and crude for you. You belong to the old ages of blood and fire—just as I do. The West is too cold for us.”

“You are talking great nonsense, my dear Prince,” Lord Newtown put in. He was at home in all the capitals of Europe, and had known Constantine as a little boy—the naughtiest little boy of his whole acquaintance, as he had not scrupled to inform him. “The old ages were most uncomfortable, and blood and fire are out of date.”

Constantine was looking across at Nina. He had looked at her all the evening, Guy remembered afterwards. He remembered too that he had not understood the look.

“Ah, that is the cynicism of the West—the voice that sighs for nothing but its comforts, the soul that only asks to be at ease,” Constantine retorted pleasantly. “Blood and fire are no more out of date than human nature, my dear old friend—but I don’t expect you to admit the fact.”

“I’m glad of it,” Lord Newtown said drily.

“For I certainly should not do it, and then we should quarrel. I’m eighty-four, and you’ll perhaps pardon me for saying that I have as little affection for human nature as I have for what you are pleased to term blood and fire.”

Constantine shrugged his shoulders with imperturbable good humour.

“I bow to your experience,” he said gracefully. “But for me blood and fire remain the two things that make the world attractive. A vista of cold civilisation—of good dinners and good manners—does not charm me at all. I am merely a barbarian of the Middle Ages—and, frankly, I don’t find this century congenial to me. For me, not even a revolution in Pavlograd wholly redeems the grey respectability of life.”

“Is that why you are going to Africa?” Nina asked seriously.

They all laughed — perhaps none of them quite knew why. And, across the roses of the dinner table, Constantine’s eyes rested on the girl’s face with an expression half mocking, and half melancholy.

“Ah, yes,” he said, with a shrug and a sigh, “perhaps that is why I am going to Africa.”

Guy wondered afterwards how he managed to sit out that dinner. He was thankful for

the presence of a stranger, which diverted the general attention from him—thankful that he had merely to listen to Constantine and Lord Newtown quarrelling peaceably over their dinner—thankful, above all, that Nina was more interested in Constantine's conversation than in his own silence.

He was thankful, too, that Constantine took the after-dinner conversation also into his own hands. And, when they rejoined Nina in the great drawing-room which looked upon the sea, he was glad that Constantine went naturally to Nina's side, and relieved him of the necessity of talking to her.

He remembered afterwards that she was looking wonderfully pretty that night—almost for the first time since he had known her he admitted that she was really pretty. And in her prettiness there was an odd likeness to the man who sat beside her—the man who had kissed her and given her chocolates when she was a child. She had wished to be like him; perhaps she was more like him than she herself knew.

“Tell me about Slavonia,” Guy heard her say eagerly.

Constantine laughed, and looked round. There

was a piano standing at his elbow. He sat down on the music stool, and was silent for a moment, looking at Nina over his shoulder.

“Come and sit where I can see you,” he said, in a low voice, “and I will tell you stories of Slavonia—stories of blood and fire!”

Nina obeyed him. She drew a chair to the side of the piano, and sat there, with a fascinated look on her face; and Constantine began to sing little Slavonian folk-songs—wild fragments of barbaric music set to words wilder still. His audience could not understand the words—it was probably as well they could not; the music, with its clash of steel, its hurry of flying hoof-beats passing through stormy nights under the black pine forests, was comprehensible enough. It was blood and fire, as Constantine had said; and he sang it as no one there had ever heard a man sing. His voice carried them away to the dark hills, to storms raging over them, and a stormy people dwelling upon them.

They never knew how long they sat there listening. Constantine stopped at last, and rose. Through the open windows, in the silence, the splash of oars was clearly audible. It was the boat coming to take him back from Mon Paradis.

And then a curious thing happened. Nina

sprang up from her chair, with a white face and startled eyes. She seemed to be listening to a sound which the others could not hear; and suddenly she caught Constantine's arm.

"Don't you hear it?" she said, in a hoarse whisper very unlike her usual tone. "What is it?—oh, what is it?"

They all stood silent, listening intently. They heard the splash of the oars, the voices of the men who rowed as they came nearer and nearer. Nothing else.

But Guy, looking at Constantine's face, had a curious impression that he too heard something—something which Nina heard, which the others could not hear.

He disengaged himself very gently, and took the hand she had laid on his arm and kissed it.

"I hear nothing," he said, quite quietly. "Good-night, my cousin."

He nodded to the others without speaking, and went out of the room and Guy followed him. He walked straight down the broad staircase without speaking. At the bottom he turned and looked at Guy.

"What did you hear up there?" Guy asked bluntly.

Constantine hesitated for a second.



“It’s an old story,” he said, almost indifferently. “And it’s not a pretty one. Nina knows it, evidently. When one of our family hears—*that*—it means that a member of the household in which we hear it is about to die—or so the tradition goes.”

He paused for a moment, and looked towards the open door, listening.

“You don’t hear a drum beating?”

“No.”

Constantine shook hands rather quickly.

“We call it ‘the Drummer of Sclavonsk.’ Good-night, Francheville.”

It had come at last—the moment from which there was to be no escape.

Lord Newtown had hobbled off to bed, declaring he had not spent such an agreeable evening for years. Standish had followed the old man's example. Nina had disappeared when Guy returned from bidding good-night to her cousin. And Guy went to the library, and sat down face to face with his fear.

On the pretence that he had had a headache and had not been able to eat his dinner—which was true enough—he had ordered some food to be left for him on a tray in the library. He sat looking at it now. He told himself that when the house was still, when the servants were safe for the night, he was to carry the contents of that tray up the secret staircase.

He told himself this again and again. But he did not believe it.

Once before he had escaped. Fate had intervened at the last moment. Would not Fate be merciful now?

He sat and listened for silence to descend upon Mon Paradis. He did not know whether he was more impatient for the coming of that silence, or more afraid. He heard the sound of doors being barred and bolted—and remembered the barred door in the tower. He heard the sound of departing footsteps on the stairs, and it seemed to him that he heard the sound of his own steps ascending the secret staircase, ringing, with a sharp, unnatural sound, in the little antechamber of stone.

At last all sounds died away. Mon Paradis was asleep. Only Guy, in the library, kept watch; perhaps, in the lighted tower, the Unseen Thing kept watch too.

And then, as once before, he made his way up the interminable stairs—through the secret door in the bookshelf filled with pretty trivial volumes which seemed to mock at the thing they helped to hide. As once before, he climbed the little hidden stairway, and stood at last in the antechamber. Once again he saw the great door with its eloquent bolts and bars, and felt himself on the threshold of the Unseen Thing.

He stood still, waiting. A moment more, and he would hear the awful voice, crying for

the familiar figure of its dead jailer—crying for freedom, as he had heard it cry on the night when his father had all but opened the bolted door.

He waited. There was no sound.

Between the narrow walls of stone the silence seemed intense. It began to be more terrible than the sound he waited for had been. What was the meaning of this stillness?

Surely the Unseen Thing had heard his approach? Why did it not cry as it had cried before?

He waited. He even moved noisily, hoping—or fearing—that the Thing might hear. Perhaps it slept—perhaps. . . .

He thought of the three other guardians of the secret which now was known only to him. Did they perhaps watch him—were they near him in the thick silence of the little antechamber of stone? Somehow it would have comforted him to think so, but he could not do it. He was alone—alone in the night, alone on the threshold of the thing he feared and hated most on earth. A few inches of wood—a few bars and bolts of iron—these were now the only barriers left between him and the Unseen Thing.

And he looked at the bolts—he put out his hand and touched them, even—with a strange sort of wonder, a strange sort of curiosity. He had only to draw them back, and pull open the heavy door. It was quite easy—ridiculously easy.

It was quite easy—yes. But in his heart he knew that he would not do it.

The consciousness of that was growing upon him every moment. He stood there, fingering the bolts, but he knew that he did not mean to draw them. He touched the strong wood of the door, and he knew that he did not mean to open it—ever. The consciousness of that lay deep down in his mind, far below the upper surface of thought. With the upper, superficial part of himself he could afford to lie, even at that moment, because he did not dare to be frank. He could say to it, “Another second or two and I will go in.” But far down in his heart a voice stronger than that answered and denied what it said.

Very gradually, as the silence continued unbroken, he began to deceive himself, to play with a hope which he had entertained since his last arrival at Mon Paradis. He had hoped that the Unseen Thing might die before Fate called

upon him to open the door. He knew now that he had done more than hope—that he had counted upon that as the solution of his dreadful difficulty. Spence's death, just at the moment when release seemed in sight, had filled him with despair—and fury. It was the last, worst thrust of Fate—it had had the effect of making him desperate where before he had been only fearful—it had changed the horrible shrinking from the thing he hated to an obstinate determination. Now, looking at the bolted door, hearing no answer to his movements behind it, he began to ask himself whether the release had not come—whether the Unseen Thing had not escaped from its prison for ever?

And—if it had—what need to open the door at all?

What need, indeed, for he had promised to keep the secret. It would be kept best by leaving the door unopened. No one would ever know what the secret chamber hid—no one would ever suspect what slept in the tower.

He listened for a sound—the faintest sound; there was none. For a movement, for the smallest stirring of life; there was none. He told himself, with almost terrible relief, that the life which had dwelt there had gone out. The



mysterious, awful flame of that existence which had been a curse to all around it had flickered out into merciful darkness.

He remembered the spectral drum which Constantine of Slavonia had heard, which had meant the death of someone in the household where it was heard. Nina had heard it, as well as Constantine. It had meant—this. This silence, this relief, this ending of a long horror, this blotting out of a life which had been worse than any death. The Unseen Thing was dead.

He told himself so. If, deep down, the sceptical voice asked whether he was sure, he would not hear it. He was free. He could only think of his freedom. He could only remember that the door of the secret room was shut for ever. And one thought rose in his mind—a thought which filled him with infinite relief. Nina would never know. He realised now that to keep Nina in ignorance, to keep her gaiety untouched, her careless spirit unbroken by the secret of the tower, he would have done very much—as much, perhaps, as it would have been possible for anyone to do. He could not have borne to lose her. And he felt that, if she had suspected, she would have left him, as he had left Grace—that she hated

mystery and melancholy as he himself hated physical deformity. She would have left him, if she had known—and probably, sooner or later, in spite of all his precautions she would have come to know. He had felt that while she spoke to him in the library. He had felt then that at all costs she must be kept in ignorance. He shuddered now, in the midst of his great relief, as he realised how terrible the cost might have been.

But now all was safe, for ~~she~~ would never know.

He told himself so again—the thought of this safety was inexpressibly sweet to him. He told himself that the Unseen Thing was dead—he could not repeat that often enough.

He waited still. He would not go away in haste. He listened while the moments went by. They might have been hours—he did not know how long he stood there.

Then, slowly, with a deliberate leisureliness, he retreated, as an army retreats in good order before an enemy. He listened still as he went down the little staircase. It was for the last time—he told himself that he would never listen for anything again on those steps which Lady Francheville had trodden so often, up which Spence, the faithful, the heroic, had passed

with a heavy heart to his dreadful task. Even as he passed through the door in the bookshelf, he listened; but he could hear nothing.

He reached the library, and set down the untouched tray with a hand which suddenly began to shake so violently that the glass and china rattled as though moved by an earthquake. His teeth were chattering as though with deadly cold. He poured himself out half a tumblerful of brandy, and drank it, neat, at a gulp. It pulled him together for the moment, but he realised that he was on the verge of a nervous breakdown of the worst description. He felt that he could hardly command his reason. He had collapsed, as one often does, when the long strain of expectation had been removed—he had fallen almost in the moment of victory.

And, as he stood there, unstrung, trembling, hardly, perhaps, in the possession of entire sanity, an awful thought shot, like lightning, across his brain. What if, after all, he were wrong? What if the Unseen Thing were not dead? What if he should hear a sound which would oblige him to go up again—to open the door? . . .

He had kept, before, some measure of control

over himself, over the horror which had been with him for so long; but now, in an instant, the control broke down utterly. As once before, hatred rose in his heart—hatred and fear triumphant, and not to be withstood. And he knew that he would not go up, if he knew the Unseen Thing alive—that he would leave it, in cold blood, to die rather than look upon its face.

There was a bell connecting the library with the servants' sleeping quarters. He went to it and rang. He passed a hanging mirror on his way, and stopped and looked at his own face there as though it had been that of a stranger. It looked old, and haggard—it might indeed have been a face he did not know. He remembered suddenly, as one will remember little, unimportant details at such a time, stories of men whose hair had turned white in a single night—in a single hour; and he wondered stupidly whether the morning would see him too white-headed.

Presently François came, startled at being called at such an hour.

He looked curiously at his master, but Guy hardly noticed the look.

“I am going to Nice—now—at once,” he

said. "Get the dogcart ready as soon as you can, and do not disturb anyone."

François made a gesture of bewilderment.

"The dogcart?—to drive to Nice?" he murmured.

"No—to drive to Saint-Maure. They must send an engine and a carriage or two down to Fréjus with me, and I will catch the first train."

François looked as though madness had descended upon them both, but it was done. They drove away through the darkness between the long lines of palms. Only once did Guy look back—at the lighted tower, the window in which the light never went out; and he saw, with an extraordinary sensation, that it was lighted no longer. The tower turned a blank, unseeing eye to the radiance of the moonlit sky.

François saw it too. He started violently, and almost drew up.

"The light has gone out!" he exclaimed.

Guy did not speak for a moment.

"Yes," he said at last, very quietly. "It has gone out. If you do not make haste, we might as well not have come."

They drove on, between the black palms. But in a few moments François spoke again.

“I hear something—something crying,” he said, in a voice that was low and almost frightened.

“I hear nothing,” Guy said steadily.

He did not hear anything, it was true; but he felt as though at any moment he might hear the sound he dreaded to hear, and he took the reins suddenly from François, and lashed the horse savagely with the whip.

They passed flying through the black shadows—flying, as though from something which pursued them; and the noise of their flight drowned that other noise of which François had spoken—the sound of crying which he had thought he heard, but which Guy could not hear.



FOR three days Guy remained at Nice, unable to return, unable to face the possibility which had driven him from Mon Paradis like a thief in the night. He wrote a thousand apologies to Nina. Business over which he had no control had called him from her—he invented lies with the glibness of desperation. She took no notice of his excuses; and Lord Newtown condescended to write two lines, stating that the party was getting on remarkably well without its host.

But on the fourth day, to Guy at his hotel, enter Standish—Standish no longer jubilant and shameless, but nervous, wild-eyed—a wreck, a ghost. Guy, preparing to greet him with the usual commonplaces, was struck with his singular appearance, and looked at him inquiringly; and Standish, throwing away the remnants of his self-control, cast himself into a chair with something very like a wail.

“Oh, my dear young friend—oh, devil take the pair of them!” he cried. “After your

princely generosity—ah, I always felt a disposition like yours was bound to be bitterly disillusioned—it's so like my own. The same thing has happened to me always—as I have so often told you, my poor boy, I never did a man a good turn yet but he offered to kick me down——”

“What has happened?” Guy cut in.

Standish looked feebly about him.

“A B. and S., dear boy, before I say another word. Ah, but I haven't the heart to tell you——”

It was only too obvious that, whatever Standish might need at that moment, it was not—or at least ought not to have been—a brandy and soda. Guy took no notice of his appeal.

“Will you kindly tell me what is the matter? Is Nina ill?”

“Ill? Lord, no—she'll live to be a hundred, like her mother before her!” Standish cried, with magnificent disregard for facts. “She'll live to disgrace the name I gave her because she hadn't a decent one of her own, like that beast Eugénie——” and he burst into hideous accusations against the late Madame Cabardés, which, at any other time, would have turned his hearer sick. But Guy hardly heard what he said.

“What has happened?” He took Standish by the shoulder and all but shook him. “Tell me—tell me at once.”

Standish pulled himself together, and produced a couple of notes, which he handed to Guy with a hang-dog air.

“It’s not my fault, Francheville—’pon my word of honour, it’s not my fault. I always liked you. Devil take it, I don’t know what I owe you, and now I shall have to pay up!” he murmured in conclusion.

Guy did not hear. He had opened the first note, and was reading it, with a sensation of entire stupefaction.

“DEAR GUY,” Nina wrote, in a round, rather childish hand, “I didn’t answer your letters because I was rather glad you were away, as I had found out something. Guy, I don’t know how to put what I want to say, and perhaps it doesn’t matter if I put it badly, because, however nicely I put it, you couldn’t be expected to like it. Only I don’t want you to think me an absolutely ungrateful wretch, because I’m not that. You have been very good and kind to me, and I thank you for it—you’re the only man I ever met, except your grandfather,

who wasn't shady, and well—perhaps, you're the only man who isn't shady that I ever shall meet now—I don't know. And you were good to me—you treated me as though I had been that girl you were engaged to before—your cousin, Lady Meyringer. You never behaved as though you remembered poor maman—I shall always, always like you for that.

“Oh, I wish I hadn't got to hurt you—do, do believe it hurts me to hurt you, Guy, for it does—most awfully.

“You remember I told you, the first time I ever saw you, that I wanted to be like Constantine—that I had seen him when I was a child, and that I liked him. I think now I must always have liked him, from the very first. I had thought of him often, and when I saw him the other day—I suppose you know now what I am going to tell you. I was very fond of you—and I am now—and I would like to have married you and not been shady any more, so that people couldn't cut me, or make love to me in the sort of way papa's friends did, because of my mother; and now I suppose people will always cut me, and I shall always be shady, just like poor maman. Perhaps it's because of her that I can't help doing what I am going to do.

“I am going to Africa with Constantine, and you must forget me as soon as you can; but I shall not forget you, I shall always be grateful to you, and sorry I had to hurt you. I am very, very sorry, but I love Constantine, and I never did love you—I don’t think I ever pretended to. And it’s much better to find it out now than when I should have had to run away and give you the bother of a divorce.

“I don’t think I have put it very nicely, but you see what I mean, and I hope some day you will forgive me, and I am—though I don’t suppose you will believe it—Yours affectionately,  
“NINA.

“*P.S.*—Constantine is writing to offer to fight a duel with you, if you like, though I tell him Englishmen don’t do such things. He only laughs, and asks if the men in England are sheep? But I say they are not really interested in anything but Golf and the Fiscal Question, and only object to their wives being run away with when they can claim nice big damages—and I’m not your wife, and you won’t care.

“*P.S.S.*—I have left Dr Blanco at Mon Paradis because he is always so seasick, poor dear.

Will you please keep him until we come back, and I can send for him? He likes a bath every day, and *please* see that he has chicken on Sunday, and *no mice*."

Guy read this amazing epistle to the end in silence. Then he opened the second note. It was brief and to the point—Constantine would be pleased to give him any satisfaction he might think proper, with any weapons, and at any place he might name. The Prince (in exile) of Slavonia was a gentleman, after the fashion of the Middle Ages—he took what he wanted, it is true, but he had no objection to paying for it, if necessary with his life.

Guy laid the letters down. Standish was rubbing his eyes with a large and extremely white pocket handkerchief, and cursing softly to himself. He looked up at the rustle of paper.

"The heartless minx! My heart bleeds for you, my poor boy. Ah, I've a feeling disposition—very feeling—my worst enemies couldn't deny it. . . . Now, you won't be wanting the cash you so kindly obliged me with yet, my dear young friend, will you? The marriage not taking place will be a great saving to you—



you won't be wanting the few pounds you lent me, I'm sure?"

And at that Guy's nerves gave way. He saw himself flying by night from Mon Paradis rather than face the secret chamber, rather than lose Nina—he heard the cry which had pursued the dogcart in its flight—he thought of the Unseen Thing in its tower—alive, or dead? he did not know which. And here, amid the ruins of the safety he had thought so secure, the happiness he had sinned so terribly to win, he saw Standish sitting wheedling him not to press him for his loan, on the plea that he would be saved a deal of expense by the breaking-off of the marriage.

He sat down opposite Standish, and began to laugh; and when he had begun to laugh he found that he could not leave off. He laughed until he shook in his chair—wild peals of hysterical laughter which frightened Standish. He laughed until the tears ran down his face, and he felt helpless and sick—and still he could not leave off. It was the hand of Fate again—but Fate, that tragic figure, had chosen to appear for once in Carnival garb, scattering flowers, and blinding her enemies with confetti.

For Guy, at that moment, the confetti shut out everything. He had failed everywhere—he knew it even as he laughed.

But Fate herself could not have stopped his laughter.



## **IV. IT COMES AGAIN**



## IV. IT COMES AGAIN

### XXVI

“So he has come back at last,” Grace said.

She spoke to Julian Strange. They were sitting in the gorgeous and expensively decorated apartment which she called her boudoir, in Meyringer’s gorgeous and expensive house in Windsor Gate. Everything about Meyringer was gorgeous and expensive. Money was his one claim to the attention of a class to which he did not and could never belong, and he knew it. Money had purchased for him his present not unenviable position in the world; money had purchased for him the consideration of men and women who, but for his millions, would not have received him in their servants’ hall; money had purchased for him the woman who now sat pouring out tea for Julian Strange. He was a shrewd man and he knew that too. Perhaps he was proud of the knowledge, as he was proud of the house in Windsor Gate and all his other possessions. He had bought Grace, and he



knew it, and she was perfectly well aware that he did. Perhaps it sometimes occurred to him that there are bargains in the market of life which are dirt cheap, but for which one occasionally pays too dear.

“Yes, he has come back.”

“And Hilmour House is open again, and he is going to entertain us all royally,” Grace said, in a tone of careful lightness. “I am wondering whether he means to call upon—us. I have not seen him for ages, not since——” She broke off, holding out her hand for Julian’s cup, which was full. “Some more tea?”

“No, thanks. May I take another lump of sugar? Thank you.” He stirred his tea absently, and looked at Grace’s unmoved face. He was thinking that she had never seen Guy since the morning of her accident. “He will certainly come and see you, I should think.”

She shrugged her shoulders slightly and laughed. There was a hard note in her laughter. There was a hard look on her face. She had made the best thing of the life which was left to her; in spite of her lameness she had married the greatest catch of the season; in spite of the unfortunate incident with Guy she had, as an admiring American acquaintance said of her,

“got right there.” Her world owned, with grudging admiration, that she had pluck—decidedly she had pluck—the stolid, stupid British pluck which declines to know when it is beaten. For she had been beaten badly—as badly as anyone could be beaten and yet survive—and yet she had gone on, she had not given in—she had “got right there.”

But to Julian, as he sat sipping his tea, the condition of having got there did not seem enviable.

She laughed without meeting his eyes.

“How can one tell what Guy will do? He has mastered the art of being unexpected. One can’t count on him. Who would have supposed that he would take up with that Miss Standish? He has always done these things. The Hilmours have always been queer.”

She spoke lightly, callously. She was playing a part, and playing it well. Day after day she had sat and listened, with a sick terror, for Guy’s step on the stair, for the announcement of his name. She had talked and laughed and amused herself after the fashion of her kind and all the time she was listening, and dreading the very sound she listened for. Guy would come, and she would receive him. He would take his

place once more in her life—a place very different to that which he had occupied before. She would see him and talk to him and say the usual polite nothings—in Joseph Meyringer's house, perhaps with Joseph Meyringer looking on. And Joseph Meyringer's keen eyes would see nothing, though he knew the story of her engagement to Guy and its sudden termination. She was determined that he should see nothing.

A card was brought to her. She took it and looked at it with almost unnatural calm.

“Yes—up here,” she said to the servant who had brought it. As the door closed she turned to Julian.

“It is Guy,” she said.

Fate was kind to her—Joseph Meyringer would not look on.

Guy came in quickly. There was an alertness about his movements, a feverish activity, which drew Julian's eye to him curiously. He spoke quickly and nervously, and as he spoke he glanced back over his shoulder in a fashion that did not escape Julian; and there was a grey look on his face—the grey look of a man who is fighting something which he knows will get him under before long.

He drank tea, and talked commonplaces. Yes,

he meant to make some stay in England. Hil-mour House was open again. It had been shut up too much in his father's time—he meant to alter all that, he meant to entertain.

“And where have you been?” Julian asked.

He had been in many places, it seemed, but nowhere had he stayed long. A week here, a few days there. Paris—Vienna—St Petersburg; and then, after the known, the unknown. He had explored the solitary places, and they had held him no longer than the cities.

“You seem to have been understudying the Wandering Jew,” Julian told him.

Guy went on talking. Yes, he tired of places very soon.

“And when you tire of London—?” Grace said suddenly.

Once more he looked hurriedly over his shoulder; and then his eyes met hers fairly. There was an expression in them which startled her—which made her, for the moment, hold her breath.

“When I tire of London,” he said slowly, “there will only be one place more to—to go to.”

For a moment no one answered. It was a simple speech enough—it might mean anything

or nothing; but for some reason it chilled his hearers—they could not have told why.

“Ah, there’s always Mon Paradis,” Julian remarked.

Guy was sitting facing the door. His eyes fixed themselves upon it as Julian spoke, with a long, frightened gaze; his grey face grew a shade greyer. And it seemed to them that he was listening to some sound which they could not hear—some sound which filled him with shuddering horror.

So strong was the impression produced upon them that Grace turned in her chair and looked at the door too.

“What is the matter?” she said. “What do you hear?”

Her voice roused Guy. He turned towards her, very slowly. The hunted look went out of his eyes—but not before she had seen it there.

“I thought I heard something at the door,” he said. “A dog, perhaps—a dog trying to get in. I thought I heard it—whine.”

Grace bent suddenly over the tea-table.

“It was probably Sir Joseph’s fox-terrier,” she said.

Never in his life had that well-trained animal dreamed of scratching at the boudoir door; he

would as soon have thought of scratching at the gates of Buckingham Palace: but Guy did not know that, and was obviously relieved. And Grace wondered why he had wished to think that he heard a dog whining at the door.

“Ah, most likely it was,” he said more comfortably. “My—my nerves are not very good. I often think I hear things.”

They talked of other things. Presently Julian went away, leaving them alone. Grace had in vain tried to detain him, on every pretext she could imagine; and, when he had gone, Guy showed no signs of intending to follow him. He sat on in the room which was beginning to get dark. He made curt answers to Grace’s nervous conversation.

At last he rose to go. Grace, infinitely relieved, moved to the bell, and touched it. As she turned to come back to him, she remembered her lameness, remembered his horror of it. She was not very lame now—the specialist had exaggerated a little, as specialists occasionally do. But she felt suddenly a burning consciousness of her defect, and of Guy’s hatred of any form of deformity, and stopped half way towards him, awkward and trembling.

It was getting very dark—too dark to see



Guy's face clearly. Too dark, she reflected with relief, for him to see hers. And, out of the gloom which had fallen upon the gorgeous boudoir which Sir Joseph's millions, and Sir Joseph's bad taste, had prepared for the occupation of his wife, she heard Guy's voice, speaking with a sort of intensity which she had never heard in it before.

“Grace—may I come here again?”

She was so much amazed that she could not answer. She stood trying to see his face in the gloom, trying to understand. He misunderstood her silence and went on.

“I know I haven't the right to ask—I know it would be no more than just if you refused to see me, to speak to me. I treated you vilely. But I have been punished.” He stopped, shuddering. “Ah, you don't know how I have been punished! . . . Grace, I have been in hell—don't thrust me down again—give me a hand to get out!”

His voice quivered with an agony which seemed to bite like flame into her soul. If she had ever deceived herself about her feeling for him, she knew the truth at that moment. She had hated him—she had owned it to herself quite frankly; but all the time she had loved

him too; and when he spoke she knew that the love was stronger than the hatred had been.

“Oh, Guy, don’t speak like that—you hurt me so. Of course you can come here if you like. Only—I didn’t know you would care to—you see I am lame still—I shall always be lame. And you——”

In the gloom she saw him make a quick gesture of protest, of denial.

“I was afraid of you once, wasn’t I?” he said. “I ran away. Grace, I tell you I have been punished—justly and fearfully punished. And now I don’t see your lameness—I don’t see the deformity of others. I see only my own. The deformity of the body is nothing—it doesn’t matter, it doesn’t even seem to exist to me any more. It’s the deformity of the soul that is terrible—the unseen thing one carries with one, from which one can’t escape. One can run away from the deformity of the body—one can shut one’s eyes, and refuse to see. That’s what I did—and I have been punished. It’s not the thing one sees that is terrible—it’s the thing one doesn’t see—the unseen thing that lies beyond the door.”

He was silent for a moment; and again she

had that strange impression that he was listening for a sound she could not hear.

Then he came close to her and looked in her face.

“I don’t see your lameness,” he said in a low voice. “I see only my own soul.”

Without another word he went out and left her there, breathless, in the darkened room.

HILMOUR House was open indeed. For the next few weeks its great doors seemed never closed—there was no limit to Guy's hospitality. People who had known his father and mother declared, with emphasis, that you never could tell what a Hilmour would do next; they always went from one extreme to the other. Lord and Lady Francheville had been hermits; Guy was—but they did not, in their most imaginative and expansive moments, say precisely what Guy was. They contented themselves with hinting vaguely that he was “going the pace.”

“What's the Hilmour House skeleton?” one inquiring soul asked Julian one day. “Drink, or morphia—eh, Strange? Or both, perhaps?”

“Or neither,” Julian answered coldly.

“Oh, come, Strange—don't ask a fellar to believe that. Constitution ain't strong enough for it, these days. Too much of a strain, don't you know. Why, man, you know there's a screw loose.”

“I know nothing about it,” Julian retorted, with disgust.

But after a few weeks he found, to his dismay, that this was the general verdict. It was not always put in the same crude way. Fond mothers of lovely daughters sought him out in corners and endeavoured to pump him on the subject of dear Lord Francheville. Such a delightful young man! Such a beautiful house to go to—did things *so* well, didn't he? And now, dear Mr Strange, *do* tell me why everyone says such funny things about your charming cousin—in the very *strictest* confidence, of course. Oh yes—wouldn't breathe a word of anything—*certainly not*. Nothing so terrible as gossip—no, indeed not! But was it true that last Thursday, at dinner, he jumped up from the table and said that something was just outside the door, and begged the footman not to let it get at him—and then tried to turn it off as a joke? Of course it wasn't a joke—but *what was it?*

What was it? Julian heard that question very often with regard to Guy. There was nothing definite to go upon—a rumour here, a hint there. But the burden was always the same—*what was it?* There was something—

of that everyone seemed certain; but no one knew what it was. One or two began to shake their heads and talk of eccentricity in the tone which always means a good deal more. Lord Newtown's mother had lived for years after she was reputed dead—lived in an apparently unused wing of Hilmour House, occupying herself in the innocent pursuit of nursing a rag doll. At least, so it was said. The story, forgotten for years, was revived, and had quite a success in certain circles much frequented by Guy. And Lord Francheville had spent so much time at Mon Paradis for some reason — you might depend on that, said those clever people who always know their neighbour's business better than their own. And when he came to London he looked like a perambulating spectre—oh, there was something queer there, without doubt. And now Guy—well, there was something about Guy. There had been something odd about the termination of his engagement to the present Lady Meyringer; there was something odd now. The story of his joke at the dinner-table was quite true; So-and-so had been there and vouched for it. And it had not been a joke—far from it.

Society, with a capital S, decided that the



present Lady Meyringer had had a lucky escape.

Julian found that the incident of the dinner did not stand alone. A good many stories about Guy were going the rounds. People who did not know him had him pointed out to them by people who did. "Oh—*the* Lord Francheville?" those who did not know him always said, with an inquiring accent. Guy had acquired a sort of celebrity—he was *the* Lord Francheville already. But nobody explained the reason of his fame in so many words. They were too charitable, perhaps—or too cautious. They spoke gaily of family skeletons, of drink, or morphia—all things well known in the highest circles; but neither drink nor morphia was the family skeleton of Hilmour House, and even while they spoke they were very well aware of it.

One dear old lady took Julian aside one day and made the only sensible remark he had heard on the subject.

"Your cousin has something on his mind," she said. "I think, as you seem to be fond of him, you had better find out what it is."

Julian thought so too; but he did not know how to go about it. Guy, in these latter days,

struck him as rather unapproachable. He was always surrounded with crowds of people, he was always rather ostentatiously gay. Julian did not know that, on days when, calling at Windsor Gate, he was told that her ladyship was out, Guy sat for hours in silence in the gorgeous boudoir, staring at a cup of tea which he did not attempt to drink. In this, his place of refuge, the mask of gaiety which he wore elsewhere fell from him. He gave no explanation of his silence, and Grace asked for none. He had asked her to give him a helping hand, and she gave it, and asked no questions. He took refuge with her—the gorgeous boudoir was his place of sanctuary. She divined the fact. She did not know what was the matter with him, but she realised that it was something outside the order of things which submits to ordinary remedies. His friends told him to go to a doctor—a nerve specialist; they came to her and told her he ought to go, but she never answered. She felt that his malady had nothing to do with nerve specialists; she remembered his remark about it being only the deformity of the soul which mattered. Was it his soul which was deformed—maimed by some terrible catastrophe which left his body unscarred, some

awful struggle which had cost him more than life? She did not know; all she knew was that she had no inclination to recommend a nerve specialist.

But she too asked herself the general question—what was it?

She went to Hilmour House, as she went everywhere. She joined in all the gaieties. If she had a sensation of dancing over tombstones, if the wines and meats of festival had a taste of ashes in her mouth, she never said so. And, behind the gaiety, she seemed to see Guy's soul, laid bare before her for that one little, unforgettable moment. Guy's soul, twisted, terror-stricken, writhing in the deformity of which he had spoken—the deformity of the unseen, before which that of the seen is as nothing.

What had he meant? She who would have given her life to help him did not dare to ask. They were always together—as much together as they had been in the days of their engagement. People began to talk of that too. Joseph Meyringer, who had paid for his bargain, and meant to have his money's worth, told her so frankly.

“You see too much of Francheville,” he said to her, with no compunction, if with no anger.

“People are talking. I don’t choose to have my wife talked about; it must stop.”

Grace looked into the fire.

“Do you mean that I am to refuse to see my own cousin?” she said at last, in a steady voice.

“He was more than your cousin to you once. He may be more again. You were in love with him not so long ago, and you never cared a straw for me—I know that. You must give him up.”

“I can’t send him away.”

“Then we will go to Nice for the winter. He won’t come to Nice,” Sir Joseph remarked, with an unpleasant smile.

“And if I refuse to go to Nice?”

He swung round on his heel and looked her full in the face. His own was dark and threatening.

“If you refuse—? Look here, Grace, I think we had better understand each other. I know it’s the fashion, but I’ll have no other man playing the fool with my wife—understand that. I married you for my own amusement—not for Francheville’s. And I’ve no sentiment, and no mercy. I warn you frankly, don’t go too far.”

“What do you mean?” Grace asked hotly.

“I mean that there is such a thing as divorce,” Meyringer answered drily.

She was very angry. She had always known that Meyringer was not a gentleman, but she had not known before that he was a brute. And the absurdity of suggesting divorce as a consequence of a modern flirtation put him more outside her world than ever, though she was too much annoyed to be amused at the absurdity at the moment.

“It is you who go too far. When I married you I never gave you the right to insult me. If you were not what you are you would know that a man doesn’t threaten his wife with divorce because she flirts—and I am not even flirting with Guy. I can’t help what people say, and I shall not go to Nice.”

Somewhat to her surprise he said no more; but she found out that he meant to take her away, in spite of her refusal. People came to her and congratulated her upon the good time she was going to have, and the delightful villa Sir Joseph had rented at Nice. She had to say the usual thing, to smile, to appear to know all about it; she had too much pride to say frankly that her husband had told her nothing of his plans, and that she did not mean to leave

London. She knew that she could not refuse to go—that Sir Joseph was not the sort of man to be defied, except in extremity.

She never spoke to Guy or Julian of her impending departure. She did not know whether either knew of it—neither alluded to it in conversation with her.

A week before the date fixed for her departure Guy was to give a ball at Hilmour House. She was to go. Sir Joseph was out of town, but he had made no objection to her going. She was to have dined with some friends before going on, but at the last moment her friend had been taken ill, and the dinner had been abandoned. Grace dined at home by herself. Julian was out of town too, or she would have sent for him to enliven her solitude.

When at last her carriage turned into the gates of Hilmour House she received a shock. The house wore no air of festival. There was surely something wrong—what had happened?

A perturbed-looking footman was found to answer her hurried inquiries. He stood at the step of her carriage, obviously uncomfortable, moved by some great shock from his usual dignified calm. The invitations had all been cancelled an hour or two ago—her ladyship's



among them. He couldn't say how it was she had never received the intimation that the ball was put off. Mr 'Awkins—the butler, an old retainer of the late Lord Francheville—had taken upon himself to cancel the invitations; he had also wired for Mr Strange, but he wasn't sure of the address——

“Can't you say what has happened—why the invitations are cancelled?” Grace cried sharply.

The man fidgeted. Would her ladyship see Mr 'Awkins? He thought it might be best, as she had not heard——

Grace sprang out of the carriage, and brushed past the pallid footman into the hall.

“Send Hawkins to me in the library at once.”

Hawkins came. He, too, was pallid and perturbed. He had noticed for some time that his lordship was strange in his manner—that he fancied things which were not as he thought at all. To-night at dinner his manner had been odd. He did not speak, and he kept looking at the door. Her ladyship had perhaps noticed that he had a habit of looking at the door? And after dinner he left his guests and went to the white ballroom to see everything was to

his taste before people began to arrive. James, the second footman, was there, and described what happened. He said his lordship was standing near one of the doors, and suddenly he seemed to hear something, to listen intently to some sound which he, James, could not hear. He went grey in the face with fear—it was awful to see him. And he cried out that “it” was coming—that “it” (whatever it was) was outside the door and crying to come in. He was very strange in his manner, and very wild, and James ran out of the ballroom and fetched the butler.

When they returned they found Lord Francheville in a very excited state, still staring at the door. They tried to reassure him, but in vain. They reminded him of the ball—he did not understand them, or pay any attention; and at last, to their horror, he whipped out a loaded revolver.

They tried to get it away from him, but could not. Then it was that Hawkins sent away the guests of the dinner-party—who had fortunately not gone to the ballroom with their host—on a pretext of illness, cancelled the ball invitations, and wired for Julian. He had not liked to send for the doctor until someone came; but Lord

Francheville was in the ballroom, and James and Samuel were watching him.

“Have you got the pistol away from him?” Grace asked.

No, they had not. He became violent when they tried to get hold of it.

Grace rose from the chair into which she had thrown herself.

“Take me to the ballroom—and send James and Samuel away.”

Hawkins, the well-trained and obedient, protested respectfully. Her ladyship did not understand. His lordship was not responsible—had not, in Hawkins’ humble opinion, been responsible for some time. It was not the first occasion upon which he had spoken of something crying behind the door. And—this had been kept a profound secret—for some time he had refused to sleep alone. His man had slept in his room, and latterly he had watched nearly all night, by his lordship’s express orders.

“Take me to the ballroom, and get the servants away,” was all that Grace said.

She went. James and Samuel were at one end of the great room, with its decoration of exquisite flowers, its illumination of electric lights. At the other stood Guy, huddled to-

gether before the farther door in an attitude of terror-stricken anticipation. Grace saw the pistol in his hand. Then she saw his face and forgot the pistol—and everything else.

“Go away at once,” she said to the two men as she passed them.

She walked slowly down the great white-and-gold room towards Guy. She was not conscious of any fear, or of any sensation at all except a pity so vast and passionate that it left no room for any lesser feeling. She went up to Guy, and laid her hand on his arm.

“Won’t you go and lie down, Guy, dear?” she said. “You are not at all well. There is nothing behind the door—see, I will go and open it and show you——”

She made a movement to go, but he caught her wrist.

“No, no—don’t open the door—don’t open the door!”

The horror in his tone was so intense that she obeyed. And she looked at his face again and was conscious of an extraordinary conviction. Hawkins and the servants thought him mad—she herself, until he spoke to her, and looked at her, had thought him mad. The thought had been inexpressibly dreadful to her, but now it

was succeeded by one more dreadful still; for she knew, she was sure, that he was perfectly sane.

“Don’t open the door,” he said again.

His tone was quieter, more collected. He seemed to pull himself together, to make an almost superhuman effort at self-control.

“I am all right,” he said, almost calmly. “I was mad for a moment, but that’s over. That’s the worst of it—I’m not mad, though they think I am. Grace, I never told you a lie in my life, and I am telling you the truth now. I am perfectly sane—I really heard it just now. That’s the worst of it—it’s no delusion; it’s the truth.”

“Give me the pistol, dear.”

“If you will promise to give it back to me when I ask for it. You must see I am quite fit to be trusted with it. I sha’n’t shoot myself—what is the good of shooting myself? That would only let him in—it would only be going out through the door on the other side of which he is. If death would release me it would be different—I should have some hope left. But there’s none—that’s the awful part of it. I’m chained—I can’t escape, either in this life or the next. I must sit and wait for the door to open and do nothing to stop it.”

He spoke quietly—too quietly. There was something more dreadful in his quietness than in any frenzy. He had probably been mad for a moment, as he said—his nerve had given way. Now he was sane again—terribly, piteously sane.

Grace took the pistol from him.

“Give it to me now—and you shall have it again. Guy, we are quite alone—won’t you trust me? What is it you hear—what are you afraid of?”

He gave her a long look. It was not the look of a madman. She knew that he was considering whether he would tell her; and suddenly she left him, and went back to the door by which she had entered, and locked it. Then she locked the door near where he stood, and came back to him.

“Tell me, Guy. What are you afraid of?”

He shuddered from head to foot. She saw that he hesitated. There was a little white-and-gold sofa near. She drew him to it, and sat down, trying to make him sit beside her. But he stood looking at her still.

“You would not believe me. You think there is nothing there beyond the door. You think—don’t you?—that I am mad.”



She did not know what to say.

“I think you believe what you tell me,” she answered at last, in a low voice. “Oh, Guy, what is it—*what* is it?”

“If I told you, you would turn away in horror—you would leave me, and never see me again——”

She stopped him.

“No, Guy—never. No matter what you had done—no matter what you were. Do you know me so little as to think I could do that?”

“I did it to you,” he said, in a strangled voice. “I deserted you when you needed me—now that I need you I have no right to expect you to help me——”

She looked up. The hardness which critics deplored as a flaw in Lady Meyringer’s beauty died out of her face; that other, inner hardness which caused it died out of her heart. Only pity was left there—a pity great enough to forgive, great enough to love still, in spite of all that had happened. And she held out her hands to Guy with a gesture which seemed to blot out the past.

“Guy—don’t say that—don’t even think it. You know that I love you still—that I have always loved you. And I shall love you—

always—I can't help it. Perhaps—" her voice shook suddenly—"perhaps I wouldn't help it, if I could——"

For a moment he stared at her with that piteous, incredulous look which had stirred her so before.

"You don't mean that," he said. "You don't—you can't mean it. If you could say that to me now truthfully—you would be more than human. If I thought you could do that—with any sort of truth—I—I——" His words trailed away hesitatingly into silence. Grace looked up, facing him as though in anger. There was flame in her eyes—the flame of truth, convincing, irresistible.

"I have never lied to you," she said, "and I am not lying now. Guy, I don't know what is hanging over you—I don't know what has made you what you are—but I know that it is something terrible—no one could look at you and not know it. But, whatever it is, it makes no difference to me."

He looked at her still with an air of hesitation.

"If I could believe that—" he said, as though to himself. "If I could believe it——"

"You must believe it, for it is true."

There was a moment of silence,

“You say that nothing could make any difference to you, but that is not true—it can’t be true. There are things a woman couldn’t forgive.”

“Tell me what you have done, then, and prove me.”

Her voice, her eyes, challenged him; but it was a challenge which filled him with terror.

“No—I can’t tell you. Don’t you understand that while you don’t quite hate me, don’t quite turn from me, don’t see me as I am, I can just manage to live—to——” He covered his face with his hands. “You’re the one thing in heaven and earth that doesn’t seem to condemn me,” he said, so low that she could hardly hear. “When you condemn me too, I shall know that that is the end. When you said just now that you loved me still I could almost have believed for a moment that there was hope for me somewhere—hereafter, perhaps, if not here—that some day—somewhere—I might be forgiven——”

“Guy—Guy—believe it—try to believe it!”

With a sudden, desperate movement he faced her again.

“Listen to me,” he said, in a hard tone. “I have committed a crime which even you can’t pardon. I am a murderer and a coward. I

left a human being to die because I wouldn't look at its deformity, just as I left you because I wouldn't look at your lameness. I am a murderer. . . . There—that is the truth—I can't tell you more. Now leave me—or tell me again, if you can, that it makes no difference.”

She heard him in silence. She seemed to see the second act of her life played in the brilliantly-lighted ballroom with its white-and-gold panelling which gleamed softly under the lamps, its smiling, mocking decoration of flowers. The cowardice which had wrecked her happiness had gone one step farther—it had deprived a human being of life as it had deprived her of all that made life worth living. Without knowing the story of the Unseen Thing—without knowing even that it existed—she understood something of what had happened. As Guy had fled from her in the hour of her trial, so he had fled from another human being who needed him—and that other, through his act, was dead. She no longer recognised the possibility of his being mad, she saw only an awful justice in this horror which pursued him—this voice which cried for vengeance and would not be silenced. She had forgiven him, though

he refused to believe it ; but the Unseen Thing could not, or perhaps was not permitted to forgive him. He carried it with him—this thing from which in his cowardice he had fled—in his own heart, proclaiming his crime, proclaiming also how insignificant was the bodily deformity from which he had shrunk beside the deformity of soul, the cowardice, the cruelty of the man who had left it to die.

For a moment she felt horror—even she felt horror. Then she remembered how awful was the punishment which had fallen upon Guy. And she forgot the horror she had felt. She had hated him once, as the Unseen Thing hated him now. She forgot her hatred. He had told her that if he could believe that his crime made no difference to her he could almost believe also in some hope of ultimate forgiveness for that crime. It seemed to her at that moment that she would have died to make him believe that, to give him hope, even for an hour. And she was helpless to make him believe it, and knew it.

She sat there, silent, speechless. She did not dare to answer his challenge, to repeat that what he had done made no difference to her love, for she dared not risk again the chance of

being disbelieved. And as she sat there, in the sickly London dawn which began to peer through the unshuttered windows, she heard a carriage drive into the court below. A few minutes later someone tried to open the locked door nearest to them. She heard voices, protesting, deprecating; and one voice neither protesting nor deprecating, but furious.

It was Sir Joseph Meyringer's voice.

She went to the door and threw it open. Outside were Hawkins and several perturbed footmen. Outside, also, were Julian Strange and Meyringer.

She stood there on the threshold, looking at them. She was very pale and very calm, and she looked Meyringer in the face without a word.

His fury descended on her like a flood. She never moved, she never attempted to answer. Once, when Julian tried to interpose, she stopped him with a look.

Meyringer paused at last, for want of breath.

“Do you expect me to take you back?” he said. “Thought I was safe out of the way—eh? Thought you might amuse yourself with your low blackguard of a cousin as you liked—eh? Why don't you answer, my lady—why



don't you tell me some lies—it's the usual thing to do, isn't it?"

"I shall not tell you any lies," she said calmly.

His fury burst out again.

"No, you've not decent feeling enough for that, I know. But I warned you, and I shall stick to my word. If you'll come back now, and swear never to see that cur again, I'll overlook it—and that's more than any other man would do, and a damned sight more than you deserve."

She looked at him with a sort of wonder that went near to maddening him.

"You want me to leave Guy—to leave him as he is to-night—never to see him again?"

Julian made a swift step forward.

"Grace—for your own sake—for all our sakes—think what you are doing. Guy isn't worth sacrificing yourself for," he said, half to himself.

"I know very well what I am doing." She turned to Meyringer. "Guy is very ill," she said quietly, "and I shall not leave him. I love him. I have always loved him, and I don't care if you know it. You have threatened me with divorce—now do your worst. I am going

abroad with Guy at once, and you may bring your action against me as soon as you like. I will see that Guy does not defend it.”

She stepped back into the ballroom with an unmoved dignity which deprived her hearers of speech, and shut the door noiselessly in Meyringer’s face. Guy was standing where she had left him. She went past him, and sat down again, as quietly as she had risen. But for all her quietness, she was trembling.

“Guy—did you hear what I said?”

“Yes.”

“It was not an easy thing to say, though I have always hated him. . . . Will you believe now that what you have done makes no difference to me?”

It seemed to her that the look of incredulity, of despair, changed on his face. He came to her, and took her hands, and let her draw him nearer, as though to protect him from the invisible horror which haunted him. He knelt down beside her as she sat there on the little white-and-gold sofa, and hid his face against the glittering folds of her ball dress.

“Grace—I never told you—that morning of the accident—it was my fault,” he said. “There was a beggar—a cripple. . . . I

pulled up and startled your horse. . . . And to-night you do this thing for me!

“Don’t think about the accident. I have always known what—what happened. . . . Guy, do you believe me?”

He looked up. There was a look of awed wonder in his face.

“You have always known—and you have still loved me!” he said.

“It doesn’t matter,” she said almost impatiently. “Guy—tell me—tell me that you believe me at last.”

For a moment he ceased to hear the crying of the Unseen Thing behind the door. It seemed to him that instead he heard the melancholy little bell of the sun-baked chapel of Saint-Maure ringing, ringing, with a sound that was almost of hope.

“I do believe you,” he said.

PEOPLE said, as Julian Strange had done, that Guy Francheville was not worth it. But they did not mean what Julian had meant. They meant that Guy was not worth the loss of Joseph Meyringer's millions and all that those millions could buy for Joseph Meyringer's wife.

They said, quite frankly at last, that Guy was mad—that Grace was worse than a fool. They remembered how he had thrown her over, after causing the accident which had lamed her for life. And yet now—!

Joseph Meyringer, for the first time in his life, found himself really popular.

But the man whom the world called mad, the woman whom it thought worse than a fool, were far away, beyond the little voices of scandal, beyond the ignorant censure of those who are always ready to judge, but who do not trouble to understand what they judge.

During those first weeks which followed that night at Hilmour House Grace had time to realise fully the task she had imposed upon

herself. The unequal combat had told at last upon Guy, and the world might have been excused for calling him mad. To Grace, the most terrible certainty of all was the certainty that he was sane. Though she never heard, with her actual bodily hearing, the voice which haunted Guy, it seemed to her that in her heart she heard it always. And in those first weeks of wandering, such self-control as Guy had been able to exercise before broke down utterly. There were moments when even Grace found herself face to face with despair. There were moments when even she felt the full force of the horror which pursued Guy—the horror of his crime—the horror of the cowardice which had caused it. There were moments when she had to fight for herself as well as for him. For, in his blackest despair, in his worst hours of remorse, he clung still, as on that night at Hilmour House, to her forgiveness and her love. The fact that his crime, as she had shown him, made no difference to her, seemed to be the one chance of hope left to him. He had done to Grace what, in another form, he had done to the Unseen Thing. If Grace had forgiven him, might not the Unseen Thing forgive him too, when his punishment was complete?

But there were times when even this shadowy hope almost deserted him. And always—everywhere—the crying of the Unseen Thing pursued him, drove him onwards, as though towards some definite goal. Nowhere was he permitted to escape from it.

At last he came to Grace one night in Paris. The hunted look which she knew so well had given place to a new look of purpose, of decision.

“Grace, I am going back.”

“Back?”

“To Mon Paradis.”

She had guessed, by the horror he always seemed to show at any mention of Mon Paradis, that it was the place in which his crime—whatever its exact nature—had been committed. Since that night in the ballroom of Hilmour House she had never questioned him, even by a look. She did not question him now.

“Very well. I am ready to go.”

He waited for a moment.

“It was at Mon Paradis that——”

He seemed unable to continue.

“I understand.”

“I feel that I must go there—that I am being driven there. But—Grace—I don’t ask you to go there too.”



“If you go, I go,” she said quietly.

He gave her a momentary look of passionate gratitude.

“But—you don’t quite understand. It may be worse—there. I feel as though—as though Mon Paradis meant the end—in some way——”

“The end?” she said, startled.

“I feel that I can’t bear much more. Always—ever since we left England—I have felt this coming—I have felt that there would be an end—that the time would come when I could not go on—could not——”

For a moment she too felt that she could bear no more.

“Don’t say that, Guy. You must go on. If not for yourself, for me. If you can’t go on, think of—of me.”

“I think of you always—if I didn’t I could not go on for one hour, for one moment. But I don’t want to take you to Mon Paradis.”

“I must go with you,” she said.

He offered no more opposition to her decision; and next day they went to Nice, and on to Saint-Maure. It was night when they arrived there, as it had been when Guy saw it for the first time. The myrtle hedges were white with myriads of tiny stars, the scent of roses came

to them out of the clear darkness; and over them the tower of the Unseen Thing hung black against the moonlit sky.

Grace felt Guy move suddenly in the seat beside her.

“What is it, Guy?”

“I don’t hear it,” he said, in a frightened voice. “I don’t feel it—it is not here—it has gone. What has happened?”

The dogcart stopped before the deep porch of Mon Paradis.

THE fishing-boats of Saint-Tropez were spreading their sails to the morning sun as Guy made his way along the deserted quay of Saint-Maure towards the little, sun-baked chapel. As he had come along the winding road by the shore he had heard the small, silver voice of the bell, calling from its bird-cage tower across the great, sun-flooded spaces of air and sea, as he had heard it that night in Hilmour House. The sound had seemed to summon him to Saint-Maure, to lead him, by a power stronger than his own will, towards the little church on the quay. And, as he had felt himself before to be a thing driven—driven by a pursuing horror—so now he felt himself a man drawn towards a certain spot, without reference to his own will, if not against it. But the power which drew him was not horror, as the power which drove him had been. He felt vaguely that the voice of the Unseen Thing and the voice of the little bell in its rusty tower were one voice—that the voice of horror mingled and was lost for a moment

in the sound of this other voice which had nothing to do with horror, and which, in the worst hour of his punishment, had seemed to hint to him of hope. The Unseen Thing had driven him to Mon Paradis; the small, clear voice of the bell drew him towards Saint-Maure.

The bell was silent as he walked along the quay. For the first time for months he was conscious, not of the inner horror which tortured him, but of the outer things which lay around him. The blue gulf deepened to purple under a cloudless sky, the yellow sails of the fishing-boats turned to gold in the hot sun. A light breeze ruffled the leaves of the trees on the quay. He stood for a moment by the church door, looking at the picture which he remembered so well. Then he went in.

The old darkness met him as he entered—the old odour of incense and the ages—the waxen hearts—the hanging ship. He remembered how he had stood there last, on the morning after his father's death. He remembered how the place had seemed to him filled with the ghosts of unanswered prayers, with bitter mockery and unending sadness. He remembered how he had gone out from it filled

with mad, cowardly, unreasoning hatred of the Unseen Thing.

A step fell on the uneven pavement. He looked up, and saw Father Blanc.

For a moment the two men stood silently facing each other in the gloom of the little chapel. It seemed to Guy that he had expected to see Father Blanc, that he had come there for the express purpose of seeing him. He had once again the sensation of a man who acts at the dictation of a power outside himself—higher than himself. He looked steadily at the priest. The face which he remembered grave was graver than when he last saw it.

“I have come to you,” he said.

Father Blanc bent his head suddenly.

“I am glad that you are here at last,” he said simply. “I have prayed that you might come.”

“I have come to tell you something—to ask you what I am to do. I cannot tell anyone else.”

Father Blanc showed no sign of surprise.

“Come to my house, then, and tell me.”

But Guy put his hand suddenly on his arm, and held him back.

“No—I want to tell you here. Do you remember, when I saw you here first, I told you

that I thought I could understand how anyone who was in great trouble—in despair—could hope for a miracle—could believe that a miracle could happen to help that trouble, to bring hope to that despair—here, in your little, old church, which English tourists only call stuffy?”

Father Blanc's grave eyes were very gentle.

“Yes, I remember. . . . Have you come to ask for a miracle?”

“I have not come to ask for anything—or to hope for anything. But if I am to tell you what I have to tell you I must do so here.”

There was a moment of silence; and in it Guy seemed to hear the little bell ringing, ringing unceasingly, patiently, as it had rung through the years—through the centuries; and above him he saw in the gloom the dim outlines of the votive ship.

Father Blanc spoke at last.

“Tell me then, if you wish it,” he said.

“Tell me—here.”



OUTSIDE, the day of blue and gold deepened towards noon, the bright sails of the fishing-boats drifted out towards the great sea, the children came, laughing, to play under the trees on the quay. In the darkness of the little church the two men stood, face to face, the one listening, the other speaking. Above them the votive ship hung like a shadow—was it perhaps the shadow of a hope?

Guy told his story. And Father Blanc heard him without a word. When at last he came to the end, there was a silence again; and in the silence they heard the laughter of the children who played upon the quay.

“I have told you everything,” Guy said. “Now tell me what to do.”

“You will do what I tell you?”

“Yes. If you think I ought to give myself up to justice, I will do it.”

Father Blanc said nothing for a moment.

“The justice of man has nothing to do with you,” he said. “I think—I don’t know how to

put it, I don't know even whether it is permitted to me to say it—but I think that you have passed through the fire of a greater justice than man's—I think you have seen the justice of God.”

“I have been in hell,” Guy said. “While I felt that I could not confess what I had done. But last night—when the voice was still—when the torment ceased——”

“I understand. When the torture ceased you felt that even that was not enough—when the punishment was over, you felt that you wished to punish yourself—that nothing could be enough——”

Guy looked up.

“No one can punish me. That's the worst of it. If anything that could be done to me here could punish me, I should have hope, I should think that some day——”

“And since last night you have not been tortured—you have not heard the voice?”

“No.”

There was a strange look on Father Blanc's face.

“It is wonderful,” he said slowly. “It is very wonderful. . . . To-day, before I came here and met you, I meant to write to you.

I have waited all these months because I had a feeling that you would come here of your own free-will—no, not that, perhaps—that you would be sent. Now I know that my feeling was right. You have been sent.”

“I have been driven,” Guy said.

Father Blanc held up his hand.

“No—not driven. When you know all you will not think that. You came here—you were sent here—to confess how terribly you had sinned, to confess your cowardice, your cruelty——”

“To confess,” Guy interrupted in a hard voice, “that I am a murderer and a criminal.”

“You are not a murderer.”

There was a long silence. Guy tried to speak—and failed.

“I left him to die,” he said at last. “Don’t tell me that I did not murder him—I left him to die.”

“But he did not die. You murdered him in intention, but not in fact. You are guilty of the intention—you are guilty of the cruelty which could condemn a fellow-creature to such a death—of the cowardice that could shrink from a fellow-creature in its hour of need—that I admit. But of the crime itself you are innocent.”

“I left him to die. . . . I don’t understand.”

“There was one other person besides Lord and Lady Francheville—besides Spence—besides yourself—who knew the secret of Mon Paradis, and of the Unseen Thing, your brother. As Lady Francheville’s confessor, I knew the tragedy of her life—I could not help knowing it, since it was that which brought her into the Church I serve. On the night when you fled to Nice, leaving your brother to die, as you have said, you sent back your groom with the dogcart from the station at Saint-Maure. He suspected something—he had always had an idea that something living was shut up in the lighted tower. Your flight that night, following so closely on the death of Spence, who had always been in such confidential relations with your father and mother, roused his suspicious, and inspired him with the fortunate thought that he would tell me what had happened. When he left you, he came direct to me, and told me. The secret was not mine to make public, as you know, but I went back with him at once, I went to the room in the tower—I found your brother there.”

“You went there—alone—in the middle of the night?”

“The secret was not mine,” Father Blanc said simply. “The existence of the Unseen Thing, as you call him, had been revealed to me only under the seal of confession. I could not take anyone into my confidence. I went to the tower, and found your brother, and took him away with me to the *presbytère*.”

Guy remembered the cry which had sounded behind the barred and bolted door—the sounds of a mad strength hurling itself to and fro. He looked almost incredulously at the thin figure of the priest.

“You took him away with you? He let you take him away with you?”

“He was quite gentle—quite quiet. He did what I told him—he seemed stunned—he resisted nothing.”

Guy said no more. He thought of the terrible strength of the tower door, with its bars, its studded nails, its thickness. . . . And then he remembered the Angel who stood with Daniel in the lions’ den, and shut the mouths of the beasts who would have devoured the servant of God.

“I took him to the *presbytère*, and gave out that he was an afflicted relative of my own. Of course I kept him inside the house, but he gave

no trouble, he was as gentle as a child. The part of him which you feared—his madness—his strength—the horror of him—I never saw—never.”

“No,” Guy said. “You would not see it. The part of him that I feared—that I hated—the horror of him—pursued me, who had abandoned him through an impulse of selfish cowardice.”

“I see now that it was so—but until to-day I have never understood his gentleness, his silence. All that I felt was, that you would come back, that you would repent your cruelty and wish to make amends. I knew that, just as I had been sent that night to the tower at Mon Paradis to save you from the consequences of the crime you had intended to commit, so you would be sent here to tell me what you have told me to-day, and to find consolation.”

There was a sound of triumph in his voice as he ended, and Guy looked up. The hunted look had passed from his face.

“You are right—I was sent here. . . . Father—take me to him.”

For a moment the priest hesitated.

“You are not—forgive me for saying so—but you are not afraid? You wish to see him—you have conquered the horror you felt?”



“The horror I feel is for myself,” Guy said passionately. “What am I that I should fear anything? It is I who am the monster—it is I from whom he should turn in horror—I am the deformity, not he. . . . Father—take me to him—let me make what amends I can.”

But still Father Blanc seemed to hesitate; and as he stood there looking at Guy, the bell above them began to ring with long, soft strokes in the gloom. Guy caught his breath as he heard—the long, soft strokes seemed to beat against his heart.

“The question of amends is not in your hands. I cannot take you to him.”

“I am too late?”

“Your brother died last night, Lord Francheville,” said Father Blanc.

MONTHS had passed since Guy stood with Father Blanc in the little church on the quay.

There was no longer a shadow upon the beauty of Mon Paradis, no hidden horror lurked among the roses and the palms, no secret darkened the clear southern sky, the musical southern sea. The towers and cupolas of Mon Paradis basked in the pink light of sunset; and at the end of the terrace, where Guy had heard the dreadful story of the Unseen Thing, Grace sat in one of the long cane chairs, with her eyes upon the sea.

Only a few hours ago she and Guy had been married very quietly in Nice. She was thinking of that as she sat there in the soft sunset light. Of all the troops of friends and relatives who had assisted at her first marriage, only one had been present at the second.

Julian Strange had come over from England for the occasion, in the teeth of much opposition. Grace's family had never forgiven her desertion of Sir Joseph Meyringer and his

millions. They said still, with much pathos, that she had disgraced them. Only Julian would hear no word against her. Perhaps he alone, of Grace's world, knew, or guessed, something of what had happened that night at Hilmour House. For he had loved Grace, in his own way, as she had loved Guy Francheville.

So he had come, for the second time, to her marriage with another man. He told himself, with a flash of sudden irony, that it was his rôle in life to see Grace married—to other people. But perhaps he was not unhappy. Grace had what she wanted—he was unselfish enough to be almost contented with her happiness.

One other guest appeared at Guy's wedding. While Guy and Grace and Julian were breakfasting on the terrace of their hotel, before departing on their several ways—Julian to London, and the Franchevilles to Mon Paradis—there flashed forth upon the terrace, preceded by a meek and gesticulating waiter, a little lady in a white muslin dress, with a muslin hat which seemed trying to stray down her back. When she saw Guy she swept the gesticulating waiter aside with a regal wave of one little gloved hand, and ran up to Guy.

“I heard you had just been married, and I had to come and speak to you, because I know now that you have forgiven me,” she said. “I also—I am married.” She shrugged her shoulders, with the prettiest air of resignation. “I am only morganatic, of course—but at least it is not as poor maman’s unfortunate affair. . . . Guy, present me to your wife, and give me something to drink your health in.”

It was Nina Standish, after all, who made the success of Guy’s wedding-breakfast. Her butterfly gaiety was invaluable. Even Grace, who had spoken of her once as “that Miss Standish,” was charmed and conquered. She drank to their health in guttural Slavonian, which sounded almost comic in her pretty mouth. She infected even Julian with a momentary light-heartedness, and saw Grace and Guy off to Saint-Maure with very real kindness and good feeling; and when the train had glided out of the station, she turned to Julian with something very like tears in her eyes.

“That woman is an angel,” she said. “Oh yes—I have heard all the stories—and I repeat, she is an angel. What do stories matter? It is not the story that the world tells of us that is the true one, is it? Ah, I see you think as

I do—you are sympathetic, though I thought you did not approve of me when I first arrived on the scene. It was my hat, perhaps—Constantine always says I wear hats that take away my character! But then the hats that don't take away one's character are as stupid as the frocks that don't take away one's age. . . . Mr Strange, I shall expect you for some shooting in the autumn." She stopped full in the track of an approaching truck laden with luggage, and kissed the tips of her fingers to the vanishing train. "*À bientôt, mes amis!*" she said, with a laugh and a sigh. "May there be no serpent in your Paradise!"

So Guy and Grace started for Mon Paradis with Nina's parting benediction and Julian's good wishes warm in their hearts. The world disapproved of them, and judged them; but these two, so unlike in all but their common comprehension, their uncommon charity, judged them—and wished them well.

And now the sunset was pink on the sea, and across the gorgeous sky the procession of evening clouds drifted softly, changing, shifting every moment, and every moment becoming more beautiful. Over the palms and roses of Mon Paradis, over the wild green hills covered

with cork-trees and myrtle, the clouds passed slowly, like a great procession carrying banners of gold and purple. And as Grace looked, the banners seemed to change to fantastic monsters which writhed and snorted flame. She watched them, and thought of that other monster whose strange and dreadful existence had passed among all this unearthly beauty of sky and sea; she thought of the Unseen Thing, of the story which Guy had told her after his interview with Father Blanc in the chapel of Saint-Maure. And as she thought of it she heard a step behind her.

Guy stood on the terrace, looking at the sky; and she saw that he too remembered the Unseen Thing. She rose, and went to him.

“You see it too?” she said.

She put her arm through his as he stood beside her, and he felt the light pressure of her fingers tighten suddenly.

“Guy—after to-night we will never speak of it again, unless you wish it—we will blot out the memory of your suffering. But to-night I want to know—I want you to tell me—Guy, do you ever hear the voice of the Unseen Thing now?”

“Yes,” he said gently.



“Oh, Guy—when?”

He looked at the sunset for a moment—at the cloud monsters drifting across the gorgeous sky. Then he looked down and met her eyes, filled with a sudden sadness, a sudden pity. And he put his arm round her, and held her to him for a moment in silence.

“I will tell you when I hear it,” he said. “When I see the deformity I used to loathe—the ugliness that, in my blind cruelty, I despised and hated—then I hear, in my heart, the voice of the Unseen Thing. I hope I shall always hear it then—always—as long as I live.”

“You hope that?”

“Yes.”

She understood. The voice of the thing he had loathed had become to him the voice of pity, of humanity—the pity he had not felt in the days of his own careless happiness—the humanity he had not wished to feel. But, in spite of all, she regretted, for that one instant, with a foolish, human, illogical regret, the boyish gaiety which had shed such sweetness and light over her own youth and his.

“Oh, Guy,” she said, almost passionately, “some day the voice will be silent—some day you will forget.”

“I would not forget, if I could. There are some things that are worth all one pays for them—all one could pay, no matter what it might be. If I could forget the Unseen Thing—if I could forget all those awful months of horror and fear—if I could go back to those old days in London when we were so happy together, when life and love and hope were like new toys in our hands—I wouldn’t go back—I wouldn’t be spared one instant of all the torture I passed through, for the sake of that one moment in the ballroom of Hilmour House, Grace, when, in the midst of my agony, my despair, I said to myself—as I said for months afterwards—as I say now, ‘The woman whom I deserted in her hour of need loves me still, forgives me everything, has sacrificed herself to help me; some day that other soul whom I deserted will forgive me too.’”

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The sunset faded over Mon Paradis, the terrace was deserted. But over the sea, where the cloud monsters had passed in fantastic procession, two enormous wings of cloud stood up, the wings of a huge angel, against the pale, clear green of the sky.

The last rays of the sun caught them and

poured upon them an unearthly splendour. The great golden wings seemed to overshadow the white towers to Mon Paradis with a shadow of forgiveness and peace.

The cloud monsters had faded, the horror had passed away. Only this was left—the shadow of an angel's wings falling upon the sleeping gardens of Mon Paradis, and the empty tower which had once been the prison of the Unseen Thing.